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FEBRUARY 3
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VOL. 16 Nº 3

Published Twice a Month by THE RIDGWAY COMPANY

J. H. GANNON, President — GEORGE B. MALLON, Secretary and Treasurer

Spring and Macdougal Streets - - New York City
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered at the New York Post-Office as Second-Class Matter

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

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A Complete Novel By J. ALLAN DUNN

A thrilling mystery and adventure tale of the great Southwest. It is by the author of "The Petals of Lao-Tze," "Rotorua Rex," etc.

"MR. HARRINGTON'S WIFE"

By W. TOWNEND

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Published Twice a Month **Yearly Subscription, $3.00 in advance** **Single Copy, Fifteen Cents**

Foreign postage, $2.00 additional. Canadian Postage, 60 cents.

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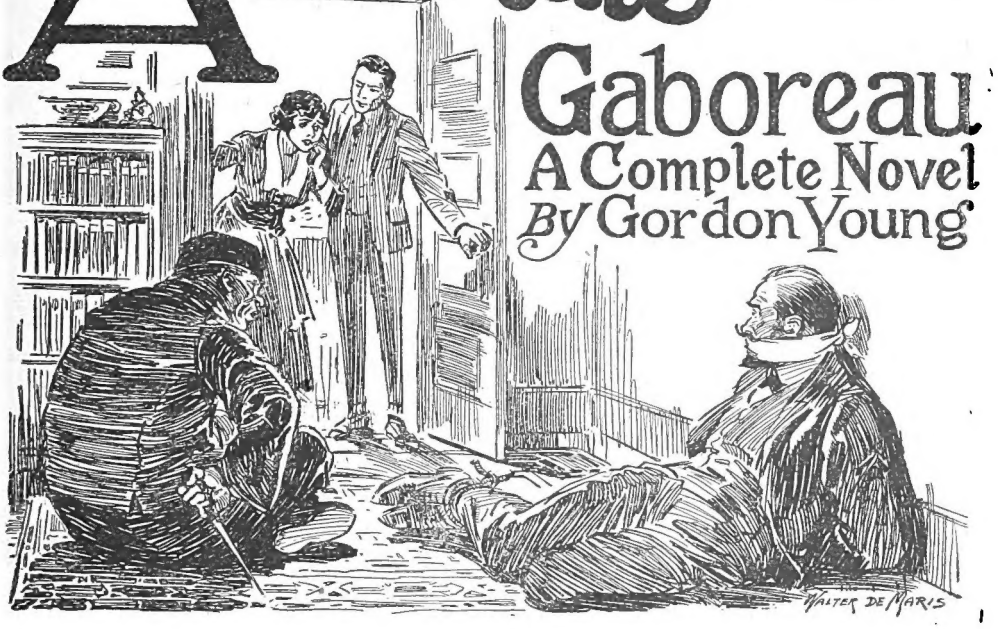
Adventure
FEBRUARY 3, 1918
VOL. 16 No. 3

Gaboreau

A Complete Novel

By Gordon Young



Author of "Bluff and a Little Luck," "Dangerous Men," etc.

THE ORIEL was a small café and nestled unobtrusively in the basement just around the corner from a street that had more or less traffic on it and a reputation that was not of the fairest. But the Oriel seated and served the people who came, and no questions were asked. There was nothing Bohemian nor boisterous about it, nor was there the air of quiet refinement which small and interesting cafés are often said to possess.

Two blocks south the district was notoriously disreputable; two blocks north respectability was unquestioned; so the Oriel took on something of the colors of each, and it was the sort of place where an observant one might expect to see curious people. A sort of a sanctuary, it was, in that No Man's Land between the stamping grounds of the sheep and the goats—to borrow a phrase from the pulpit.

To the north lay those good people who hadn't thrown away their chance of heaven; to the south were the unregenerate, and they mingled at the tables of the Oriel because the service and food was such as brings a man back again and again though he may have had some scruples about sitting across from a fellow with loose lips and shifty eyes. It was the sort of a place where one could entertain himself by guessing from which direction, north or south, the men and women around about him came.

There was a pleasant quality of uncertainty as to who was who; and I found it none the less interesting because I did not care a whit from which district man or woman came when he or she sat beside me or across from me. And some one was always sitting close, for the Oriel was small and crowded, and no doubt preserved what traces of respectability were upon it by closing before midnight. It furnished food and a pale table wine—not entertainment.

I came so frequently that the waiters

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spoke to me as to a regular and valued patron, which I was far from being, though none for the life of them could have told my name. And being one who does not easily enter into conversation with strangers, and one who tells nothing when the strangers solicit the conversation, I was no better known in the place than though I had been a mute and visited it but once. The habit of talking is one in which I have discouraged myself with persistency; for I get myself dragged into so many curious, and sometimes sinister, affairs that even discreet and casual remarks have occasionally come back like carelessly thrown boomerangs.

I never came to the Oriel seeking trouble, or the synonym for it which is more euphoniously called "romance." I will go as far as any man should to avoid trouble. And as for romance—that means a woman is implicated—and I will travel fast and far to evade one of them; or at least all of them except one. But there is trouble enough in the world to lay almost any man by the heels even when he moves as cautiously and unobtrusively as I do; and I sometimes wonder what on earth could have happened to me that has failed to happen if I had gone about looking for trouble.

Take the Oriel Café, for instance. The man that sat opposite me appeared uneasy and kept pulling out his watch. He ate rapidly, but at last, with his dinner unfinished, he left as though in haste to keep an appointment. I never saw him nor heard of him again. He was a complete stranger. But he was the direct and immediate cause of my getting into one of the worst affairs of my rather unquiet life.

I followed him casually with my eyes and saw him bump into the woman who was coming down the steps and through the door as hurriedly as he was going out.

I noticed at once that she was breathless and excited. There is not much that goes on around me that I do not see. I would have been gathered to the grave of my fathers at a very immature age if I had not been wary and observant from my youth. And I saw that the girl was breathless and excited from more than haste. She was frightened and badly frightened. For a moment she stood indecisively by the door like some hunted, cornered creature that did not know which way to turn.

Then she saw the vacant place opposite me and came rapidly to the table. It was the only unoccupied seat in sight.

"Please, please talk to me!" she said in a low voice as she dropped into the chair and began feverishly to unloosen her coat.

I noticed that she tore a bunch of violets from the coat and threw them under the table, stooping over and making sure that not one was left in sight on the floor.

"Talk to me, please! Please! Say something—anything—but swear I've been with you all the evening!"

She appeared to be unusually young for a woman who was in trouble in the section of the city around the Oriel. She seemed to be nothing more than a girl, scarcely more than a child; but I am never very positive when it comes to telling either the age of a woman or the experiences that have been hers. Perhaps most people would have called her pretty. She was not ugly. I could tell that much all right.

"You must talk to me. You must," she said, leaning forward and fixing her light-blue eyes on me.

I glanced past her to the door and stared in that direction for a moment.

"Oh, talk to me, please!"

"Very well," I said, slowly, taking my eyes from the door and looking into her face. "The tall man with a black Vandyke beard, rather closely trimmed, has just come in."

She made a repressed gesture of alarm, and the blue eyes were lit with a flash of fear.

I had guessed correctly, as any one might have done, when I asssociated her fright with the man who came in soon after her.

"He is looking around," I went on. "He has seen you. He is watching me. He hesitates—but—no—yes, he is coming this way."

"Oh, don't let him take me! Swear that you know me. If he recognizes me he will take me and——"

I leaned back in my chair and put my hand up to hide a yawn, for the man was not far away, and I could tell that he was scrutinizing my face. He was welcome to scrutinize all that he pleased. I ignored him and the fact that he was approaching. But there was consternation on the face of the girl, so I said loudly enough to be heard by any one who was listening a few feet away:

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"There are many more interesting places than this in the city, but if you enjoy it——"

THE man with the black Vandyke was by the side of our table. There was no ignoring him longer. He had stopped.

I have often remarked the ability of women, even the young ones, to dissimulate. They turn pale at the sight of a caterpillar and climb chairs if a mouse squeaks; sometimes they faint at the sight of a gun, and they are invariably fluttered by signs of danger; but at the crucial instant they draw upon some mysterious reserve force and seem instinctively to take the rôle which is most difficult to simulate—that of calmness, of unconcern. Terror was in her eyes as she seemed to feel the man approach. Then she gripped herself with that reserve force, or ability to dissimulate, or whatever it is that women have so much more of than men; and she smiled and carelessly brushed back a stray from her bright, copper-colored hair.

"Pardon me, monsieur," said the man with the black Vandyke, "but I wish to speak to this woman."

I straightened up in my chair and looked at him inquiringly. Then I asked coldly as one had the right to do of an impudent intruder:

"And why do you wish to speak to Miss Deering?"

That surprised him. He did not blink, but I fancy he came near doing so, for he looked at me a moment in an abstract, blank way that people do when hearing something they haven't expected to hear and do not understand. Then he stared down at her, and I could see plainly enough that he was sure he had made no mistake. But she, as though unaware of his interest, was busily powdering her nose with the aid of a small mirror which she had taken from an initialed hand-bag. She held the mirror low—down by the edge of the table—as though modestly keeping it out of sight. All of which gave her an excellent pretense for bending over and keeping her face somewhat averted.

Then the man again looked at me, and speaking quietly, decisively, he said:

"Pardon me, monsieur. I do not wish to make trouble, but——"

"Trouble?" I asked softly with a rising inflection, at the same time pushing my chair back a little, but not taking my eyes from his face.

"But, monsieur," he protested, raising a hand as though to sooth me, "I must speak."

"I am not interested," I told him.

"But, monsieur—"and he raised his voice slightly, and a note of threat crept in—"this woman——"

"More respect, sir!" I said sharply.

"Ah, I beg pardon," he began humbly, and then his voice went in a distressed crescendo as he explained, "But, monsieur, this *lady* just came in here——"

Again I checked him with an interruption and asked:

"Just came in? How do you know?"

"I followed her. By accident we met. I knew it was—" and he stopped.

"Who?"

"I can not speak of it," he began, and his tone grew rapidly insolent. "This is very important. I do not know you. She must go with me."

"Must?" I asked, and paused to give him a second or two to think it over.

And while he was thinking I stared at him with narrowed eyes and slowly got up from the chair.

"You make a very reckless use of words, my strange man," I added. "And you have exceedingly strange manners as well. You bustle in here off the street, and peremptorily ask for my guest. Look there"—and I pointed down at the table—"she just came in, did she? And had a half-finished dinner awaiting her? Look at that salad—half gone. The fish—eaten. The wine—half drunk. One must wait to be served in this crowded place, yet you say she has just come in.

"I don't know why I take the trouble to point these things out to you when it would be as easy to complain to the proprietor. Perhaps to the police—especially, as you admit having followed some strange woman you meet by accident. Jeannette," I said, being careful to select names that conformed with the initials I had noticed on her hand-bag, "do you know this fellow? Have you ever seen him?"

She raised her head and gave him a cold stare. Her eyes met his and held them. She did not flinch. She might have been inspecting a servant of whom she did not in the least approve. For that matter there was no sign of approval or disapproval.

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The man seemed of no more interest to her than thin air.

I am very careful not to admire women, particularly strange ones. But I thought she did remarkably well, especially as she said nothing at all, but looked away indifferently, as though it was not worth while to make a denial. Most women would have been less artful and have taken the trouble to say that they never had laid eyes on him before. She conveyed the impression that she even resented the patience I was taking not to be rude to so preposterous a fellow.

"Have you any further remarks to make?" I asked cynically.

And the man with the black Vandyke seemed for a moment almost persuaded that he had made a mistake. He knew that he hadn't; and yet he looked at her coat as though seeking some distinctive mark that would reassure him. I presumed that he missed the bunch of violets. He stared at the dishes before her as though they were animate things that had in some way taken part in a conspiracy against him. He was baffled, but incredulous.

He was no dunce, that man. He had a keen face and a cat-like personality—one of those soft, male feline fellows with claws that disappear under suavity and shoot out again. I could tell that his scratch would be painful; and I could tell also that he was one who made at times a discriminating use of his head. He knew that he could not press me farther without having his fur rumpled; and he showed his wit as well as his wily duplicity in the way he made an about-face and said that evidently there was a mistake; that he was regretful, and that he thanked me for my courtesy, and would the lady accept his deepest apology.

But there was a sardonic quality in his voice and manner—so faint that one could not fasten upon it and show resentment, but strong enough to indicate how little he cared whether or not I believed that he had been duped.

The girl shrugged her shoulders and continued to stare across the room. She did not give him so much as a parting glance, and his eyes watched for it. No doubt he hoped that if he could catch her for a moment off guard he would break down her poise. But she was not to be caught off guard. She avoided his face, and rather overdid the part, in fact.

Then he again apologized to me, but between his words was the sardonic warning that he did not consider the incident closed; and the implication that if I knew who he was I would have some difficulty in feeling comfortable.

I listened and said nothing. I had played my hand and, figuratively speaking, had won the girl—whom I did not in the least want. I felt that when he forced himself into the game again it would be time enough for me to show him that he had probably made a mistake in thinking it was an easy matter to make me uncomfortable. Moreover, I might have told him that he talked too much to be impressive, but there seemed to be no reason why I should give him pointers on how to play his hand more effectively.

He left my table, but at the door I saw him stop and speak to the cashier, then point toward me. The cashier, with patrons in line before her, gave a hasty glance and shook her head. She might have looked carefully and cudgeled her memory for all the information it would have gained him, for she did not know my name. The precautionary non-communicativeness with which I hedge myself about had not been amiss. Perhaps if he had heard my name he would not have been surprised that he had been bluffed out.

But when the man with the black Vandyke started through the door and up the steps he stopped and looked back at me. Across his shoulder I caught and held the stare of his hard black eyes. It was plainly a threat he sent. Like many men who are more intent upon being impressive than upon winning whatever may be at stake, he had not only warned me with his tone, but over his shoulder he cast a menacing threat; whereas it would perhaps have been the better for him and what plans he had if he had disarmed my suspicions.

I would probably have been suspicious of him anyway. But I don't think he knew that, or realized it. Perhaps it is a wise provision of nature that makes the cutthroat sneer and so give warning when he is kicked away and means to sneak back some time and have revenge. He was not a typical cutthroat. He was far too well dressed and had better manners, though he did misuse them. And after he had stared as wickedly as he could and had not succeeded in beating down my eyes, he

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seemed to sneer in his beard at my presumption in not being intimidated, and went out.

THE girl sat with her hands clenched and her face drawn. She had braced herself capably to meet the crisis, but the crisis was over and she was about ready to go to pieces. She seemed even more frightened than when she came in.

I was not inclined to be sympathetic. Being sympathetic with women is a hazardous procedure; and moreover, I really knew nothing about her. I didn't know whether she came from the north or the south, and was respectable or otherwise. Some men say they can look into a woman's face and always tell; but I have known some of them to make mistakes—sometimes getting a slap in the face and sometimes getting a purse lifted.

"He has gone," I said. "Now I would like to hear something about it. What, may I ask, is the occasion for this—these amateur theatricals?"

She looked at me as though I had hurt her, which is always an easy thing for a woman to do; and indicated by the expression on her lips and in her eyes that she thought it ungallant of me to refer so lightly to her predicament. But at least she did not break down, as she was near to doing. Her pride was touched painfully, so she pulled herself together and said with an attempt at sarcasm:

"I suppose you think this has been just an—an interesting adventure for you!"

"Hardly an adventure—yet."

She looked at me intently for some time, as though trying to read on my face the meaning of my words. No doubt my manner was something new and disappointing to her. She expected, and as a young and pretty girl had the right to expect, something different.

I do not know much about women, though many of them have got me into trouble. That has not been due to any alert gallantry on my part, for I mistrust any woman who is pretty, and no one ever heard of an ugly one making any real trouble for a man unless he was short-sighted enough to marry her. But willy-nilly I have often been mixed in their affairs—just as in this instance.

And being in, I have always played my hand as well as I could; and about all that experience has taught me is that he is a wiser man than I who can tell the first thing about what any woman will do under any given circumstance. There is only one woman in the world who is intimately known to me; but she does as she pleases and has a way of seeing that I do too. But Vivian is not like any other woman that I have ever met, except in so far as she is a bewildering perplexity.

The girl with the red hair assumed the manner of one who has a surprise to make. She asked in low portentous tones:

"Do you know who that man was?"

I shook my head slightly.

"Antoine Gaboreau!" she said, and watched closely to see what I would do.

I did nothing more than continue to tap the edge of the table noiselessly with my fingers and watch her face.

But I knew Gaboreau by reputation for a daring and mysterious rascal. There were many stories told about him; strange stories which one heard and overheard. For my part, I had given little attention to him. He operated, I knew, though I had never seen the man, a princely gambling establishment, but as the mechanical games were featured, I was never sufficiently interested to make any effort to locate his establishment—which was changed from time to time. I play cards, not roulette.

It was said that the police had long looked askance at Gaboreau for more than gambling; but it is one thing to know that a man is a crook and quite another thing to prove it. I recalled rather indistinctly something about Gaboreau having been arrested at one time, and then the police had been astounded to discover that the Gaboreau they had picked up wasn't in the least the Gaboreau they wanted. He was said to have a brother that resembled him as one twin resembles another. Some people said he had two brothers. I had heard that he had as many as three. Quite a remarkable family, it would seem.

I had also heard him spoken of as "charming," as a very handsome and piquant scoundrel. Women were said to love him at sight; but that means nothing, for the world is overrun with women who will love at sight any man with black beard and eyes. But from what I had heard of him, he was not the manner of fellow who would follow a woman accidentally met on the street.

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He did not need to. Yet the man with the black Vandkye did resemble the man Gaboreau as I had heard him described.

"Gaboreau?" I questioned indifferently.

"Yes," she whispered tensely.

"And what," I asked, "is the reason for his interest in you?"

"He wants to get hold of me! I have been warned against him!"

She was not unthrilled by the idea, though considerably disturbed. That is, she was not blind to the fact that it put her in a dramatic situation; and, perhaps naturally, she expected me to be impressed.

"So?" I asked, not caring to appear too much as though I believed her.

As a matter of fact I did not know whether or not to believe her. Women like to think that they are in danger of having some man forcibly get hold of them. Perhaps it is a fond racial memory of the stone age, when men are said to have wooed them with a club. I usually believe only those women who tell me something that agrees with what I already know.

"Don't you believe me?" she asked.

"Well, so far I have no particularly good reason for thinking you have staged this little theatrical for my personal benefit."

"You must think I am an adventuress!" she retorted with some heat.

"No, not at all. On the other hand, it is quite obvious that you are not used to adventures. They rather upset you—make you nervous."

It is never well to show tender solicitude for a strange woman, particularly to the young ones, who seem to demand it as a right. Youthful romantic men are very susceptible to beauty in distress, and beauty in distress knows it. I am not romantic. Behind all romance, as behind every comedy on the stage, there is dull prosaic work of shifting scenes, stitching bangles on fluffy skirts, the jealousies and quarrels, and now and then the gleam of a knife. All the romance that I have known has been from behind the scenes.

I have met the men in anger, the women in a rage. It is romance or tragedy, according to whether you happen to be the man who gets the girl or the man who gets shot. I have sometimes assisted both ways, and I know the ugly seams with which the garments of romance are patched together. I never care to wear any of them. So young women with innocent blue eyes and pitiful tales are likely to find me unresponsive.

She did not know just what to say. But if I had known she was wholly alone and a stranger in the city, and without money too, I would have been a little more considerate—though perhaps as wary. It is no fault of mine that I am cautious. If the recording angel has attended faithfully to his work he has notations to show that women themselves are largely responsible for that.

"I am a stranger," she said simply, and a bit pathetically.

"But you knew Gaboreau?"

"I had never seen him before."

"No?"

"No. I had not. Why are you so suspicious of me? You act as though you do not believe a word I say!"

"Perhaps I don't," I said and did not smile.

"But if I were to tell you the truth you wouldn't believe me. Nobody would."

I neither denied nor affirmed, nor encouraged her to go on. She waited for me to say something, but I had nothing to say.

"I don't know how he came to recognize me," she went on. "I haven't been here much over two hours—in the city, I mean. Frank told—that is, I was warned to look out for Gaboreau. But I never thought I would meet him. I never dreamed of it. I heard a long, long time ago that he was a tall man with a black beard, and I have never forgotten. I noticed him when he passed me—I was noticing everybody. Then he stopped and spoke to me. He mentioned the violets—I had been told to wear them. But I recognized him at once. He was tall and had a black, closely trimmed beard. I ran from him. He followed me. I ran faster and turned the corner. Then I saw this café and darted down the steps.

"I didn't know what I was going to do. Then I saw this vacant seat at your table, and I thought if I hid the violets and you would only talk to me that he wouldn't notice. I thought he would look for some one who was alone. I was sure he didn't have time to see me closely. That's why I rushed up to you. And you—I thank you. It was—was fine of you."

"Go on," I said.

"Go on?"

"Yes. If you didn't intend to tell me

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everything, you had no business to tell so much."

"There is nothing more that—that I can tell you."

"And who," I asked, "is Frank?"

"Frank?" She was trying to pretend that she had not mentioned his name. It was poor pretense. As an actress she was coming down in my estimation.

"Oh, Frank. Oh, you see—his name isn't really Frank."

"No?"

"No. It is Franklin."

"I see. And who is he?"

"I was to meet some one who would take me to him. He couldn't come himself. That's why I wore the violets and came down the left side of the street. The man who was to meet me did not know me. And I didn't know him. And I was late, dreadfully late. I lost my purse on the train, and I had only some change in my bag. I had to take a street car and I got all twisted."

"And who is Franklin?" I repeated.

"A friend of mine," she answered evasively and with stubborn finality.

"Why couldn't he come?"

Again there was apparent in her light-blue eyes the assurance that I would be surprised, perhaps startled, at what she had to tell me. She leaned forward and whispered tensely—

"His life is in danger!"

THUS her melodrama was being compounded. It was not much of a plausible tale to be unfolding to my ears, for though I have known stranger things to happen than she spoke of, I have found that it is only on the stage or on the screen that melodrama pays attention to such details as she was suggesting. There was something suspicious about her story. Whether she was holding back something from me or had herself been duped, was not for me to decide then. I was far from being sure of her, though she looked innocent enough, unsophisticated in fact. But unsophistication is a part of the worldly maiden repertoire.

I drummed lightly on the table and looked away. I was not exactly pretending that I was giving no attention to what she had said, but I was in fact giving more attention to the little foreign-appearing man who had scarcely more than slits for eyes and who was using them as soon as he passed the door to pick out something more than a seat for his dinner.

I saw him look about the room, and I saw that his eyes rested upon the woman with me. More than that, I noticed that he expressed dissatisfaction when the waiter tried to lead him to a table some distance from us. He stood pretending to be looking for a table that suited him, but again and again his eyes returned to the woman and occasionally he gave me a studious stare. But I did not let him see that I was watching.

"So his life is in danger?" I asked abstractedly.

"It is," she said emphatically. "And so is mine!"

"You are fortunate to know it," I assured her.

That nearly took her breath.

"Fortunate?" she asked, in amazement.

"Yes. One seldom need be alarmed when he knows there is danger. The time to be badly scared is when the waters are unruffled and no breeze blows."

"I don't understand," she said, with unmistakable sincerity. "My life *is* in danger. Really in danger!"

I looked at her and perhaps showed the trace of a smile, for she asked me of what I was thinking.

I did not tell her that I was thinking that she acted as though conscious that a camera was catching every expression and a dictagraph was taking down every word, all later to be reproduced in some theater where she would probably be herself a spectator and anxious to approve of the leading lady's work. In other words, that she was theatric. But then, most people are in the midst of their first adventure.

"You have no place to go?" I asked.

"I don't know the first thing about the city. I only know one person in it, and I don't know where he is."

"You have no money?"

"If I could get a check cashed."

"Hardly, if you are a stranger, and have nothing to identify you."

"Well, I must go some place, I suppose," she said, rather helplessly.

"And being a stranger and in danger, you will be very foolish to wander around alone."

"Are you offering to take care of me?" she asked with a chilling, challenging intonation. She did not think much of me.

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"No," I said, still keeping an eye on the little foreign-appearing fellow who fidgeted by the door, "I am not offering to 'take care' of you. But I can take you to either of two places where I am sure you will not be molested. One of them is the police station."

She gasped a little at that, and was too surprised to answer at once; and she watched me with puzzlement and showed a faint trace of alarm.

"Police station?" she asked, as though to make sure she had heard aright.

"Yes."

I said nothing more just then. I was not intentionally tantalizing her, but I was busily watching something else.

The man and woman at the table next to ours had arisen and were reaching for their wraps, while the waiter hovered helpfully around them, and solicitously looking out for his tip.

"But why?" the girl asked. "Why the police station?"

"Because it is a safe place," I answered, without looking at her.

"I won't go there. Of course not."

She pronounced it with finality. She was a little indignant. I had been absurd, preposterous.

I leaned toward her and said in a low voice:

"Listen closely. In a few minutes, seconds maybe, I shall make some remark about leaving. Please don't argue or hesitate about it, but get right up and come with me. I shall explain outside. No, there's no mystery about it. Only I can't say anything more now."

I spoke to her with a directness that conveyed what I wished to convey; that is, that I meant what I said. She saw that I was in earnest. I never shout or frown and seldom threaten because, fortunately, I have never needed to do those things to be convincing.

I had scarcely finished and leaned back in my chair when the little foreign fellow, at last discovering a table that pleased him, hurried forward and took one of the vacant places almost at my elbow.

She did not notice him. She was looking at me closely and wondering what I was about.

"There is really no need for being so solemn," I assured her.

"I am not so sure."

"But I am positive."

"But why the police station?" she insisted.

What I told her was not exactly the truth—or at least what I made her think was not the truth, though what I told her may have been; but I was speaking for the benefit of the keen ears that had come near us to listen. The little fellow sat fumbling with the menu scarcely an arm's reach away. I could have reached over and placed a wad of cotton in each ear had I wished to close them. But I did not wish. It was more interesting to know that he was listening. I answered with that air of conscious modesty which some men always use when being impressive, and said the police station was a place where I had some influence—and none of it was political.

"Oh," she said, and understood that I was a policeman or a detective.

What the little man by us understood, I do not know, but he tried to catch another glimpse of me by turning his face around and not moving his body. He almost choked himself.

Since he had come close to hear, I had no wish to disappoint him by keeping silent. Besides, I thought I could make a remark or two that would keep him attentive, particularly when I heard him ask the waiter for pickled peppers and spaghetti.

"Do you find the Oriel as interesting as you expected you would?" I asked her.

She laughed in a surprised, nervous way, and said that she thought she had probably found it a little more interesting than most people do.

"Such curious types," I went on. "Look about you."

She turned her head this way and that, but didn't in the least understand.

"They run strongly to ears. Have you noticed what prominent, large, flappy ears they have. Look at any one of the people close by."

She thought I was jesting strangely.

And perhaps I was. But the little foreigner with his back to us fidgeted in his chair and fumbled with menu and ice water and cutlery, and whatever else was in reach; but he couldn't resist the temptation, and at last raised a hand and gently felt of his ear—first one and then the other—touching it appraisingly.

"And," I went on, "there is still another

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reason why the police are given to watching this place."

I let whoever heard think, if they cared to, that the police watched people with large ears.

"Do they watch this place?" she asked, a little apprehensively, and I could not tell whether it was because she regretted havin fallen into dubious company, or whether she did not care to be under the surveillance of the police.

"Indeed. The police have found that the criminal class comes here a good deal. The food is highly seasoned, you know. Perhaps that attracts them."

I was libeling the Oriel outrageously, but the order for pickled peppers from the table by the side of us could not go unnoticed. And the little fellow still seemed worried about his ears, and touched them from time to time tenderly.

"I don't understand," she said.

"Highly seasoned food, you know. You have heard of the criminal appetite, haven't you? Well, it is the kind that craves pickled peppers, chilli, spaghetti heavy with peppery sauces. If you make a careful study of it, as the police have done, you will find that men with large, spreading ears—the sort of ears that catch every word spoken at the table next to them—usually order pickled peppers or some such thing."

"Really?" she asked, with the interest of one who has forgotten her unpleasant situation.

"Oh, yes, it is very well known to the police. But, of course, the information is not given out to reporters, you know. If the crooks heard about the discovery that science had made, then these large-eared gentlemen would eat their pickled peppers in private, and some of the most valuable clues of the police would be lost."

"I see," she said, a little bewildered, for I had spoken without trace of smile or jest.

I glanced at my watch.

"I believe it is about time for us to be going."

She looked at me indecisively for a moment, then said all right, and stood up. But she was not at her ease.

I caught my waiter passing, and got the check. He had forgotten that the dishes before Jeannette, or whatever her name was, had not been served to her, and made no remarks.

The little fellow at the next table had also forgotten about his ears and his peppers, and was fidgetting more than ever in his chair. I surmised that he had been instructed to follow as well as to listen to us.

I WAS slow and deliberate about leaving. I enjoyed watching him fidget, and took all the time possible so he would be the longer on pins and needles. I fumbled about the napkin as though looking for something that had been laid on the table and could not be found. I talked with the waiter about trivial things, and in one way and another I lingered for some time and out of the corner of my eye watched the little fellow squirm and twist, jiggle his knife, tap his glass, and turn his head from side to side, as though to give each ear an equal portion of service.

The girl was beginning to be more than uneasy. She was downright suspicious, and could not understand the first thing of what I was up to. No more had I understood about her, so we were even. But all my life it has been that the more nervous the other party became the more reason I have felt for not being nervous myself. She watched me with evasive eyes, as though trying to find out something when I did not think she was looking.

"Are you ready, Jeannette?" I asked.

She said that she was.

"Are you quite sure you haven't forgotten anything?" and I glanced significantly toward the floor under the table, where lay her scattered bunch of violets.

"I have everything, everything. Thank you."

"Very well, then, we must be on our way. We shall have to hurry."

I suggested that we would have to hurry because I didn't want the little fellow to think he had plenty of time in which to follow us; because if he dogged along far enough behind he might succeed as a shadower.

But as I received my change from the cashier I saw that he was not intending to wait for his pickled peppers. He had no intention of letting us get out of his sight.

As I passed through the door and started up the steps, I saw him rise and hurry forward.

The Oriel was on a quiet street. There were few people in sight, and not a taxi

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anywhere. The modest Oriel was not a profitable loitering place for cabs. I wanted one, but I did not intend to go about looking for it. I counted upon having an engagement very soon in the darkened doorway of the wholesale Italian grocery that was just above the Oriel. I saw a young fellow passing who appeared as though he would not be offended at the offer of an easy dollar, so I gave him one and asked him to bring a taxi. I stood to one side of the stairway leading down to the Oriel and right by the grocery doorway.

The little foreigner came bounding up the stairway and hastily looked about.

I had pushed him into the darkened doorway before he knew what had happened.

"Listen," I said quietly, putting my coat pocket against him so that he could feel the muzzle, "you go back down there and finish your dinner. Tell the waiter that you have changed your mind again and that you are hungry and that you are not in a hurry. And if Gaboreau wants to know who has interfered with you, tell him to call on Captain Harrison at Headquarters, any morning between 10 and 12, and any afternoon between 2 and 4. And by the way, haven't I seen you some place before? Your face looks familiar. And those ears—one could never forget them. Maybe it is just your picture that I remember. We have quite a collection of pictures at Headquarters. All right, get along now. And take your time with dinner."

The little fellow's eyes were no longer slits. They had opened wide. He seemed trying to sink into himself, and started to speak; but I told him not to say one word, not one, because I did not like to be informed that I was mistaken; that if he wasn't intending to follow me, so much the better for him, because I had a decided prejudice against being followed, particularly by strangers; but that I was sure he needed the dinner any way, and for him to go back and get it.

He went. But he gave me a lingering look, as much as to say that he was inclined to think that I was bluffing but that he was in no position to find out. I haven't a doubt but that, too, he dreaded having to think up some suitable excuse to explain to Gaboreau why he had failed. But his worries were not mine. I could have figured out ten suitable excuses for Gaboreau while I teased my head for one idea as to what I should do with the girl.

But I am never long without a plan, no matter what the exigency. I would have known very quickly what to do with her if I had known what sort of a girl she was; but I didn't. I am not one of those discerning young men who can read a woman's soul in her eyes. Not much. And I am of the opinion that many of them often mistake belladonna for the light of innocence.

When the little fellow went below to finish his dinner the girl came closer to me with something of reassurance in her face.

"I heard what you said," she told me.

"Yes?"

"Yes. I think it fine the way you got rid of him. How did you know he was trying to follow us?"

That is the way with many people; they depend on their ears only for what they find out. That was the trouble with the little fellow I had sent back to finish his pickled peppers. If he had been content to sit across the room from us and use his eyes, and had taken the first available seat when he came in, I would probably not have noticed him. I might have, though. It does not take much to make me suspicious. And I was suspicious of her air of reassurance.

I told her that I knew he was following us because he got up and came after us; and she said something about the police training making one observant. I admitted that that was what it was supposed to do.

I had begun to think that the messenger had made off with my dollar without troubling himself to earn it; but as I had kept the appointment which I had in mind when I dispatched him, I felt free to go look for one myself. But presently a taxi came up, and he climbed off the seat where he had ridden to point the way.

I helped the girl inside, then told the chauffeur to drive on and I would give him the address later.

Why did you say that you would give the address later?" she asked me as I got in and sat down across from her.

"Because as yet you haven't decided where you want to go."

"I really don't care, now," she said, lightly, as though wholly reassured.

"No?" I asked a bit dubiously.

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"But why do you want to take me to the station, Captain Harrison?"

She was not afraid when chaperoned by the police captain.

"My name isn't Harrison. I am not a captain. I am not connected with the police."

"But you told that man——"

"Yes," I interrupted, "that Captain Harrison could be seen between the hours of 10 and 12, and 2 and 4. And so he can. But I have never had the pleasure of meeting him."

"But you told me——"

"That I have some influence with the Police Department, and that it is not political. And so I have. A certain commissioner and I are very well acquainted. In fact, we meet frequently over a quiet little game of cards, and I have influence enough to see that he contributes a goodly share of his graft to charity—to my pet charities."

"Oh," she said in a mystified way that showed she did not know whether to be reassured or to be alarmed.

Then, after a pause, during which she had evidently reached conclusions that brought her a little alarm, though she was trying not to show it, she asked—

"Where are you taking me?"

"I haven't decided yet."

"I think you had better let me out." She tried to speak firmly.

"You have no money. You are a stranger. Gaboreau hasn't gone to bed or isn't sulking in a corner."

"But where are you taking me!"

"As I told you, I haven't decided. You can have your choice. I shall take you either to the police station or to my apartment."

I watched her very closely, and she saw that I was watching her closely, but no doubt she thought it was for another reason than the one I had. She simply sat and looked at me. She looked at me hard, and did not say anything at all for some time. No. She did not say: "Sir, you insult me," nor "You have made a mistake, for I am not that kind of a girl"; nor any of the other cant phrases with which women of the kind guise a ready complaisance. I noticed all that very carefully, and wondered if I were not a dunce for my caution. But it is better to be a cautious than a trusting dunce; for we both sat in silence and stared at each other.

Her eyes were indignant and her lips quivered a little as she said, doing her best to control her voice—

"Take me to the station!"

"Yes. I have heard that is a good safe place for lonely young girls in a strange city," I said.

Then I spoke to the driver and gave him the address of my apartment.

"You did not tell him the police station," she said.

"This isn't a village, you know," I replied. "We have many police stations. And our streets are numbered. I don't believe I heard you say what town you came from."

She did not answer. I was unfit to be talked to. No doubt I was one of those sly, crafty fellows that girls read about. Perhaps before now I had given stubborn maidens the key to my apartment and told them to drop in when they grew tired of buffeting the world. The fair daughters of Oshkosh and Kalamazoo can not be too wary when alone in Gomorrah.

She would have a fine story to tell when she arrived at the station. I had insulted her, impersonated Captain Harrison, got her into the taxi under false pretenses, and no doubt I had a bottle of chloroform in my pocket. I must be watched very closely, and she must be ready to scream if I made a move. But then I must have a few remnants of decency in me if I did take her to the station. I could not be wholly bad.

NEITHER of us spoke for some time. Then I asked—

"By the way, what *is* your name?"

She said nothing; and I repeated the question.

"The one you have given me does very well," she replied coldly, drawing herself more into the corner, as though to be farther from me.

I looked out of the window, so she could not notice that I smiled. After a time she asked—

"Aren't we nearly there?"

"Nearly," I said.

Then—and I knew she had studied a long time before saying it, and that she had some difficulty in nerving herself to do it—she said:

I am glad to see that you—that you—that you are a—gentleman—after all."

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"Yes," I admitted, "people are surprised every little while to find that out."

"Oh."

"This is your first trip to the city, isn't it?" I asked, hopeful that she might again talk with me, since she had concluded that I was after all something of a gentleman. I had reached the point where I really wanted to reassure her.

She hesitated and then admitted that it was.

"And you are about nineteen?" I hazarded, never able to be sure with women's age; but she was obviously young, very young.

"I am older than that."

"Some weeks, or maybe months. And you think you know something of men, particularly of gentlemen. I am sorry to disillusion you about myself, but I really think you should be shown how little fitted you are to wander around alone in this city. You were content to go with me as long as you thought I was taking you to the police station. Any one else might hoodwink you as easily as myself. We are now within a block of my apartment.

"Sh-h-h. Don't scream. Sit still and keep quiet. You will hurt yourself if you try to jump through that window, and then it will be the hospital. Take out your hatpin if it will make you feel more comfortable. But don't make a noise."

"You—you—you——"

"Wretch!" I supplied.

"How dare you! Let me out. Let me out, I say."

"Remove your hatpin. It is good as a dagger."

She did take out her hatpin, and then she glared at me. The hatpin was gripped firmly and held poised, ready to strike at the first movement I made toward her. If Gaboreau had known what a tartar he was trying to pick up, he might not have been so angry with me for keeping his hide from getting pricked. Her body was rigid and she was determined to fight. A badly frightened girl she was, and no doubt felt that she had tumbled into a worse affair than the one from which I extricated her.

In some way or other I always have ill success with women. I cast about in my head for something that would reassure her, and naturally I assumed that if I gave her to understand that I was not infatuated with beauty, or anything of the sort, that she would then know I was not the kind of a man she took me for. She was no doubt aware of every point of beauty that she had. Most women are. And when I told her that I did not think she was pretty—which was, in a degree, the truth—she appeared more angry than ever.

When I hastened on to remark that if I had thought she was pretty I would not have brought her to my apartment she became silently furious. Those blue eyes became like the deadly orbs of the basilisk, and I began to reflect that possibly I had made a bungle of my rôle as a Samaritan.

Men who know more about them than I pretend to, say that women the world over like to be coddled and coaxed. "The colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady are sisters under the skin," as the one poet I can understand has put it. But the dilemma is that I know nothing about Judy O'Grady and have no acquaintance with the colonel's lady.

The girl did not understand my attitude in the least. There was, perhaps, no chance for her to. No doubt she had been brought up with men at her feet and scalps at her belt. I was not quite old enough to pretend that my interest in her was purely fatherly; and I was not quite young enough to make a good brother. I was not, and did not care to be, anything faintly resembling a lover.

To me she was just a young girl, and helpless, for some unexplained reason, alone in the city, which contained many astute rascals, and one in particular who seemed eager to get his hands on her. I had not questioned her intently about her affairs, since so far it was none of my business. I was inclined to think, however, that her affairs would be my business before long. I was interested. No one could well help being. But I could not very well get to my knees and ask her to command me.

I had been intensely skeptical about her. But when I had with deliberate forethought suggested bringing her to my apartment and she had expressed a preference for the police station, I knew enough to satisfy myself that she was really deserving of a little protective attention. If she had offered, no matter with what air of reluctance, to come to my apartment, I should have taken her straight to the police station and allowed her to tell her troubles to

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the matron. A man can not be too cautious in dealing with a woman—even with a young one. Some of these women seem to come out of their cradles with more knowledge of the world than many a graybeard carries with him to the grave.

I did not tell her anything of the kind. But I set myself to be convincing, and it is not too much for me to say that I usually am convincing when I really mean to be, and I told her that I knew of no place where she could be so safe and so comfortable as with a woman—"a friend," I said—in the same apartment house.

I did not mention that in addition to this "friend" there was my very close companion, one Yang Li, as watchful a Chinaman as ever kept a secret. Yang could not very well get rid of his secrets, being a mute. I told her that if she would come into the reception-room of the apartment house and meet this "friend" I would not ask anything more; and that if she then wished to go some place else I would see that she was taken wherever she wished to go.

"But you have deceived me so many times," she said, plausibly enough.

"Not at all. I have taken only the precaution to make sure that you did not deceive me."

"I deceive you!" she exclaimed. "How could I do that?"

"This is no place to talk it over," I said. "Here is the apartment. Put your head out of the window and look the street over. It is quiet and has an air of comfortable respectability. If it were morning, instead of evening, you might see many nursemaids solicitously trundling their charges toward the park just around the corner. This is one of the few dignified apartments where babies as well as dogs are tolerated."

She studied the apartment-house carefully through the taxi window. It looked, as I said, entirely respectable, and perhaps a little imposing. The entire block seemed respectable. All were apartment-houses, many windows were lighted, and a few people were passing along the street and in and out of the entrances. They were well dressed and mannerly folk, and would no doubt have been amused to know with what suspicions a pair of light-blue eyes in an innocent, girlish face was scrutinizing them.

With evident reluctance she persuaded herself to get out of the taxi. At the door she hesitated again, and peered within. I permitted her to take all the time she wished for she was like some timid animal being coaxed into shelter; and not in the least like the girl who had brazenly outfaced the quite capable Gaboreau.

But she ventured in. I said to the boy on watch at the desk—

"Please get Mrs. Everhard on the phone for me."

Then I showed the girl into the waiting-room, and used the telephone there, so she might hear what I said and know that I was not surreptitiously plotting to have her drugged and carried off.

"Listen, Vivian," I said. "Can you come right down? I have a young lady with me. Yes. A young lady. Very young. She is a stranger. Doesn't know a soul. How's that? Had her purse stolen or something. I am *not* always finding young ladies who have had their purses stolen. Of course, she can hear me. No—*she* is suspicious of *me*. I can't tell you more than that. No. No. No."—Vivian was wanting to know if she was pretty—"Not in the least. I can't tell you what she looks like, except that she's half frightened to death. I couldn't ask her to come up until she has met you. All right. Come on down."

Presently Vivian came down.

No woman whom I have ever known meets all situations with an easier manner and a more kind heart than Vivian. She has a great deal of what is called temperament, but she has too much humor ever to lose her temper—except occasionally with me. I had known Vivian for many, many years, and we had caused a great deal of trouble for each other; but as it all came out very well in the end, we got along splendidly.

Vivian is slender and dark, with black hair, and eyes that I call purple; and enough vitality for ten women. She has perception and courage. Indeed, she is brave and wilful, and possesses an extremely accurate faculty for sizing up people the moment she sees them. Also she speaks her mind freely, and there is little ambiguity about what she has to say when in earnest.

Vivian stood for a moment in the doorway. She glanced at me and looked at the girl.

"Miss Deering," I said, taking the name

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I had used and not wishing to hesitate over the introduction, "this is Mrs. Everhard, my wife."

That was the little surprise I had saved for her, and the girl was astonished. Whatever she may have expected, it was not that.

And no one could for an instant doubt Vivian's impulsive and generous manner. Her tongue is nearly as quick as her brain, and she sees things in flashes. An expression, a mere word, and Vivian understands.

The girl stood up. Her lips trembled and her eyes filled with tears. Her hands went out to Vivian, and the next minute Vivian's arms were around her. The ordeal was over for the girl, but I was in for it.

"There, don't cry. Don't cry. Whatever else you do, you must not cry!"

But the girl began to sob. The reaction was too much for her. Suspicion had drawn her nerves tight to resist the worst, and she had found Vivian's solicitous arms about her.

Then, turning on me, Vivian snapped—

"Don, in some way you've been a brute to this child!"

I made a deprecating gesture, silently disavowing the charge, but did not attempt to explain. Why explain to one who can talk twice as fast as yourself and put a barb to every word?

I went out to dismiss the taxi. I knew it would not be wanted again that night by Miss Deering.

WHEN I came in I found they had already gone up to the apartment. Ours is anything but a diminutive apartment. It is, in fact, two apartments. Vivian insisted upon having "room to turn around in"; which meant room to trip in, dance in, whirl about in, throw slippers and pillows at me, and dodge in. She was a little, cheerful, tormenting tornado.

Also she insisted upon having room enough in which to keep Yang Li out of sight. She did not like my Chinaman, though in all her life she has never had the slightest reason for her distrust.

The two women were closeted together for an hour or more.

Yang was in my room when I came in, but I said nothing was wanted, and he silently disappeared.

I sat with my feet on the table and shuffled a deck of cards in my hands, and tried to think of all that I had ever heard concerning Antoine Gaboreau.

I remembered distinctly that he was said to run continuously—though not always at the same place—a veritable mansion, as a gambling house and to have an exclusive clientele, including women well known in society. A murder, suicide or something on the premises a year or two back had caused one place to be closed and had got him a great deal of notoriety.

I could not imagine why a man reputed to have such interests would be concerning himself with a pretty girl on the streets. It seemed to me that he would turn such work over to some one else—if he had really been Gaboreau. He was supposed to have a double, or be a double, or something mysterious of the kind. I had not given much attention to reports about him, and I had had no curiosity about the places that he ran.

For one thing, I was not playing cards as much as I once did, although I kept my skill by constant practise, and now and then went to Johnny Blix's rooms for a game, or spent a few hours at the club, where my friend the police commissioner enjoyed a sport that he was ostensibly suppressing.

But Vivian disapproved more strongly than ever of my gambling, particularly as I no longer needed to do it, as though needing money has much to do with the reason that men play poker. She said that she did not object to my getting into trouble as long as I took her with me; and she came very nearly meaning it, too.

I reflected that men of Gaboreau's type are more kinds of scoundrel than one as a usual thing. Clever, unscrupulous fellows turn their hands to any affair that has profit in it; and brainy crooks can no more work alone than a field marshal. A petty larcenist may go by himself, but even he doesn't go far—except on a trip to the penitentiary—unless there is a man higher up who tells him what to do and how to do it.

Occasionally a super-crook, like my friend Jerry Kelly, goes it alone, because he knows he is capable and that few people in the world are to be given confidence. But even he had to trust a pawn-broker or two, and one of them gave him the double-cross. But Gaboreau was a man of different caliber than Kelly. Gaboreau must need plenty of trusted men, even if he did nothing more

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than run a gambling layout. Nobody has so many hungry grafters at his heels as the gambling proprietor in a "closed town"; and each gambling proprietor knows something of the other.

So I telephoned to Johnny Blix and asked what he could tell me of Gaboreau. He let go with a string of adjectives, not profane either, and replied that he could tell more than would be advisable to pass over the telephone. He said Gaboreau would be guilty of anything but coarse work.

"Is he the sort of a man," I asked, "who would follow a girl along the street, into a café and try to take her away from the man with whom she was sitting?"

"Not much," Johnny retorted. "He *would* take her!"

"But she was with me," I said.

"That's different," he admitted. "But are you sure it was Gaboreau?"

"A tall man with a black Vandyke, rather handsome—and catlike."

"He has a dozen tall, black-bearded fellows on his staff, Mr. Everhard. There's a lot of mystery about that chap. Cool customer. Slick. The time that woman killed herself in his gambling place off Grant Park, the police nabbed the man they thought was Gaboreau. A tall man with a black Vandyke, handsome too, and catlike. Was simply one of the 'doubles' Gaboreau uses. Nobody knows how many he's got or where he got 'em. Say, I'm slipping this to you in a whisper, but I have it on the quiet that Gaboreau is suspected of the last big killing in this town—the very biggest. Get me?"

I thought a minute, and said that I did.

"Well, if you are mixed up with him, Mr. Everhard, you're in for more trouble than you've had for some time. You know I'd do anything for you—and you know why—and I'm giving you this as a straight tip. Better get out of Gaboreau's game. He's one of the fellows that don't have to buy off the police. He outguesses 'em. I know you, and I know you play a hard game, but I know Gaboreau, too. His "rep," I mean. Something of him, too."

"Do you think he is a procurer?" I asked.

"He's anything. But he don't go about picking up women off the street—drugging strange girls—if that's what you mean. He has a lot of wires. What 'd this girl say about him?"

"Somebody warned her about him. That's about all I know."

"Well, I'm warning you, too, Mr. Everhard. But maybe she's just taking you in."

"It may be," I admitted, for there was no use in arguing with Johnny.

"I'd drop her. She's nothing to you, is she?"

"Not a thing, except that Mrs. Everhard has taken a fancy to her."

"That's just like women. They always find the dangerous things to meddle with. You'd better take a trip, Mr. Everhard. Go exploring—any place."

"I'll tell you, Johnny. Get in touch with your friend the inspector, will you, and see what you can find out about Gaboreau."

"I've already been in touch with him—ever since that thing I told you about—you know—the last big killing. I'm on the inside there. That's why I'm saying you oughtn't to sit in."

"Well, Johnny," I said, "it looks as if I had unintentionally called for cards in Gaboreau's game, and I think maybe I'll stick around for the showdown."

"You'll need a royal flush up your sleeve," was Johnny's pessimistic comment.

But he promised to tell me what he knew and to find out what he could about Gaboreau, and meet me the next day.

WHEN Vivian came in I knew that I was due to be flayed.

"Don, take your feet off the table," she said.

And when I obeyed with alacrity she climbed on my lap and clinched a small fist in my hair.

"Why didn't you tell that poor child that you were married? Why did you frighten the life out of her? Tell me!"

"But, my dear, she wouldn't have believed me."

Vivian gave my hair a pull and went on:

"You know what she thought. You made her think it. Deliberately made her think the worst possible about you! She's nothing but a child. A poor, foolish child who has no parents, nothing but a pious aunt and a lot of money and a man she loves. Oh, why do women love men! The brutes—you, for instance. And she came here to meet the man she loves and left the man she doesn't love away back in Los Angeles."

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"What's Gaboreau to do with all that?" I asked.

"Who is he, anyway?"

"I don't know. He's a gambling man, and quite naturally a rascal——"

"Of course," she agreed, giving my hair another pull.

"I don't know anything about this case at all. I don't know anything about women. I wouldn't have brought her to the apartment if she had not preferred the police station——"

"Indeed, you don't know much about women!" Vivian retorted scornfully. "Just look at that girl and you ought to have known that she would die rather than go to a man's apartment."

"I did look at her, and I didn't know anything of the kind until I had made sure. And if she had been one of the other sort, and I had brought her in here for you to mother—well, now you would have both your hands in my hair!"

"Oh, why don't you use your eyes!" she exclaimed; and with her free hand gave my nose a pull. "And now the girl is ashamed of having suspected you. I told her she ought to have used that hatpin. She wanted to come in and apologize to *you!* I told her never to apologize to any man. It's their business to apologize to us—always. And the first thing in the morning, you do it, and do it handsomely. Say you have a weird sense of humor and wanted to tease her. Say anything. But don't you dare let her suspect what you were driving at when you made her choose between your rooms and the police station. You ought to be ashamed. Good and ashamed. Aren't you?"

And, of course, I said that I was.

II

THE girl said that her name was Jessie Dutton, but that she thought Jeannette Deering a much prettier name; and the one she had had been taken from an aunt—the aunt whom she disliked very much. She asked us to call her Jeannette, but I would not agree to anything of the kind. I thought her dislike of her own name was merely a preference for one more stagey. But of course Vivian told me it was nothing of the kind, that the poor girl wanted to forget her aunt and all about her. But as near as I could tell from what Jessie said the aunt was an inoffensive soul who had given more attention to religion than to her niece.

But Vivian told me that I did not understand women in the least, which was all the more strange because I could look at a man and almost tell of what he was thinking, what he had done in the past and hoped to do in the future—all of which was not in the least true.

I know two things only about men: they are honest or they are dishonest; which means that the honest men have not been sufficiently tempted. Of women I know less. That is because they are likely as not to remain honest when somebody offers them the world on a silver platter; and again they will poke their heads through a noose to steal a bite of sugar.

Jessie and I talked together for an hour or more the next morning; and she told me more than she intended to, which is something that most people do if they are not interrupted. Vivian was entirely sympathetic. Vivian is always sympathetic. She would tumble laws and justice and the established order of things into the ocean and set up a world of emotions in which everybody would do what they *felt* was right without any regard for what they *thought* was right.

There is a big difference. A man may think it is right to take stiff interest from a widow who mortgages furniture to buy coal, but I do not believe that even the usurers feel particularly comfortable in doing so. And Vivian felt that Jessie had done exactly right in leaving her aunt and friends and rushing across country to the man she loved. But Vivian says that no one ever does anything wrong if it is done for love. Perhaps not; but a lot of foolish things may be done. And it seemed to me that Jessie had done her share.

To repeat all that she said, or to show in what manner the information she did not intend to give was disclosed, would be to make my recital as tedious as her own. She was extremely conscious of being the center of a romance, and did not neglect to put on little poses of mystery—feeling very much, as I afterward suggested to Vivian and got a sarcastic jab for my comment, as she thought the heroine ought to feel.

She was young, and like all girls was much interested in herself; and enjoyed to

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the hilt the attentive encouragement which our ears gave while she talked of several men, particularly two, of her aunt, of some girl friends, of a few dinners and dances, all of which were supposed to be pertinent to our interest because they concerned her. It would be wronging the girl if I neglected to insist that she was fine and sweet; but then she was a girl, a "flapper" as the English call their immature females, and she seemed to think this was a mighty small world since she and her affairs filled such a large part of it.

Franklin De Mey was her "true love" and, to borrow an expressive colloquialism from the rural community, "she was his'n." No wonder she loved him. He was handsome. He was brave. He was gallant. He had done wonderful things. He could say the most charming things. He had poise and passion and surprising muscles. He had once whipped a half-dozen men in a single fist fight and they were all larger than himself. She knew it was so for he had told her; and who could know more about it than the man who had done it?

So am I to be blamed for asking if this peerless gentleman was a movie actor?

I asked it quietly, almost with an air of humbleness as one does when merely seeking for the explicit answer to confirm what seems already to have been affirmed by indirection. But it appeared that I had dealt the paragon a mortal insult. Vivian kicked me on the leg, which is her favorite method of secret punishment; and Jessie became several inches taller as she replied with dramatic hauteur:

"Of course not! How absurd!"

No. Franklin was a gentleman. But he had very real dangers which caused him to be cautious. He was not a detective or anything so common, in the sense of plebeian, as that; but he had defied and offended the terrible Antoine Gaboreau so that all of Gaboreau's henchmen were out to do murder and their eyes were fastened upon Frank's heart. So of course, even the bravest man in the world would have to go into hiding in a case like that. Frank had told her so.

I gathered that it came about in this way. Franklin, or Frank as she called him, was such a bold and gallant fellow that Gaboreau had tried to entice him into ways of profitable wickedness. But of course Frank had spurned Gaboreau's solicitations. I gathered that Franklin wore his honor before her as conspicuously and spotlessly as he wore the bosom of his shirt when dressed for dinner; but I could not understand how Gaboreau would be such a blazing fool as to have offered Franklin the profits of dubious enterprises unless Franklin had in some way indicated that he would be open to such an offer. Men above suspicion do not receive propositions from crooks. At least that was my idea of the situation.

Gaboreau, she said, undoubtedly knew that Frank loved her and that she loved him. How he had found all this out was not quite clear; but according to Frank, Antoine Gaboreau had hundreds—if not thousands—of spies in all parts of the country; and no doubt some of them had succeeded in overhearing her and Frank's mutual affirmations of adoration.

I was inclined to believe that among Frank's other qualities was that of a large imagination.

Frank had appeared in Los Angeles, been taken up in Pasadena, welcomed at Montecito. Every one liked him. He had been immensely popular. No doors, to hear her tell it, were closed to him.

But Frank had suddenly been called from Los Angeles about two months before; and he had urged her then to leave with him. Since then he had repeatedly written and telegraphed for her to come to him; and at last she had dared to slip quietly away from her friends and aunt and hasten to the arms that had failed to welcome her. It appeared that even the courageous Frank could be even more courageous and resolute if she were by his side. And where the heart is, the will would also be, she said. Vivian nodded approval.

But Frank had not failed to repeat warnings against the sinister Gaboreau, who was so terrible that Frank himself did not dare come into the evening lights to meet her. It was arranged that as she walked along the left side of Water Street, in the block between Olive and Fenton—the Oriel Café was on Fenton—she should wear a bunch of violets. And she would be met by a man who would recognize her by the red hair and violets, and this man would speak to her and take her to Frank. Thus were the myrmidons of Gaboreau to be circumvented.

However, the dreaded Gaboreau himself had discovered her, and she was forced to fly into the Oriel and drop at my table.

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Frank would certainly be grateful to me for my protection, but she did not know how to get in touch with him.

"To where did you address your letters to him?" I asked.

"Oh," she said, taking an attitude of loyal obstinacy, "he warned me to tell no one that!"

"Did he?" I said. "A wise precaution no doubt. But the circumstances have changed. To where did you address your letters?"

"To the Tremaine Hotel," she said, looking at me with something like alarm in her eyes for she understood that I was not to be put off.

I had grown weary of her words and attitudinizing.

"Then perhaps we can have this little mystery over with in no time," I replied and went to the telephone.

I called the Tremaine and asked for Mr. Franklin De Mey, but was assured that no one was stopping there or had been stopping there by that name.

I asked who, then, had received the mail and telegrams addressed to De Mey which had been sent to him at the Tremaine.

I was informed that the hotel regretted that people often took the liberty of having mail sent there and got it from there though they were never guests. It was the sort of an imposition which the hotel regretted but could not very well prevent.

I asked if any one remembered the individual who had called for De Mey's mail; but it seemed that the Tremaine was too busy a hotel for Mr. De Mey's personality to have impressed itself on any one of the clerks.

There was nothing more to be gained, so I put up the receiver.

"It is well for society," I remarked cynically, "that Gaboreau did not succeed in making a crook out of your friend. He covers his tracks so well."

Jessie did not seem to recognize that I had paid a dubious compliment to her Franklin, for she assured me that there was not a possibility on earth of Frank's ever doing anything wrong. I don't know whether or not Shakespeare said "What fools these lovers be!" but he overlooked a bet if he didn't.

Then I asked, and again with directness that startled her—

"Did Franklin describe Gaboreau to you?"

"Why yes—that is, no I don't think he ever did. I remembered that when he first told me about his danger, Franklin called him a 'black-beard.' I asked if he had a long black beard. He said, 'No. A short one. A tall man with a short black beard.' But I never forgot. He warned me over and over in his letters about Gaboreau. He said he was afraid that if I did not leave Los Angeles Gaboreau would get me; and I became terribly frightened. A picture of Gaboreau was always in my mind, so when that black-bearded fellow spoke to me, the first thing I thought was—Gaboreau! And I ran."

"Gaboreau seemed to have been looking for you."

"It might have been an accident," Vivian suggested.

But I have no faith in coincidences. Such things are, it is true. But they are too readily accepted as explanations for what is often design and foresight; and I knew altogether too much about the laws of chance to feel it was conceivable that Gaboreau should have met this girl, in the midst of hundreds of thousands of women, at the only place in the city where there was any certainty that she would be. It seemed, too, preposterous to suppose that he would have recognized her unless he was looking for her. Red-haired girls are not rare; but red-haired girls with violets are conspicuous enough to be recognized if one is expecting such a girl at a certain corner; so to my mind it was obvious that Gaboreau knew what he was about.

"But I told no one," she protested. "I destroyed the letters Frank wrote me, so Gaboreau couldn't have found out even if it was one of his spies who stole my purse. I may have lost it, but one can never tell. And I am sure Frank never breathed a word. He was so careful to warn me against Gaboreau."

"He did not describe the friend that was to meet you?" I asked.

"No. He said that this friend—the very best he has on earth—would meet me. That he would recognize me and speak to me."

I said nothing for a while, but reflected that that was just what Gaboreau had done. Then I asked:

"He did not describe Gaboreau to you in detail?"

She shook her head and said—

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"Nothing more than I told you."

"When he first mentioned his deadly enemy some time ago—said he was black-bearded and tall? He might have forgotten that he told you—don't you think?"

"I never thought of it. I don't know what you are driving at. Frank needed me and I came. I love him!"

Vivian, as I have said, was sympathetic. The situation really appealed to her. She was capable of doing just such crazy things herself.

For my part, I thought that probably Jessie's devotion to Frank was exceedingly out of proportion to his deserts. Any man who would call a girl some three thousand miles into a strange city and not meet her himself, had something radically wrong with him. That was so obvious that it exasperated me to think that she did not see it. I did not point it out to her, of course. Vivian however saw it; but she was more charitable to Frank than I.

"Now, Don," she said when we were alone, "you know that you have been in places where you couldn't have met me if I had come."

"Perhaps," I said, "but I never had you come."

"I know, but—but of course, Frank isn't like you!"

So I was flattered into admitting that it was barely possible—just barely—that Frank might have a decent explanation; but I could not begin to imagine what it would be. I could not imagine what his plan or plot was one way or the other. It might be that Gaboreau was outwitting him at every turn, and had found out all there was to know of the girl's coming and arrival. It might be that Franklin, for reasons unimaginable, had himself conveyed the information to Gaboreau. Until I had the opportunity to meet Mr. De Mey, and look into his face, I had to content myself with wondering whether he was a crook or merely a coward. Of course, as Vivian suggested, it might possibly be that he had a reasonable explanation.

JESSIE told me much more about herself.

There was another man, an old man she called him. He was at least thirty-five. Very old indeed! He was prosaic; and a practical, unromantic sort of fellow; a real estate agent! Of all things, could anything be more unattractive, she asked. Oh, she had known him for years and years. He had wanted to get married and had pestered the life out of her. She liked him, but not that way. He was all right for a friend, except that he was too old and too dull.

And he hated Frank. That showed how unendurable he was. He had said awful things about Frank to her. Why, if she had told Frank some of the things that Walter Guernsey said about him, Frank would have done something dreadful to Mr. Guernsey. Frank was very touchy about his honor; and my! how he could fight. He did not give an inch to anybody.

"Except Gaboreau," I remarked, softly as I could.

But both she and Vivian heard me, and again I was out of grace.

She had not told Mr. Guernsey or anybody where she was going when she left Los Angeles. She had simply run away—to be near Frank, who, of course, was to marry her at once. Then they were to leave for Europe.

But there was no way to find Frank—so she wept.

Vivian comforted her and said that I could find him, that I could do it easily; that there was nothing I could not do when I made up my mind.

But Vivian had no delusions about me or my resourcefulness. She wanted to cheer Jessie. However, she told me to begin trying to locate Frank, just as though she were asking me to get a name out of the telephone book; and all I knew of him was that his name was, or was supposed to be, Franklin De Mey, and that he was supposed to be in the city along with some millions of other people.

I asked for a little time to think it over.

I moved to the search in a way that probably would not have met with approval from Vivian and Jessie had they known of it. I sent four telegrams before I dropped in on Johnny Blix.

All four went to Los Angeles. One to the chief of police; one to the Chamber of Commerce; one to the First National Bank; and one to *The Times*.

The first asked for information on one Franklin De Mey.

The others inquired about Walter Guernsey.

Then I went to see Johnny Blix.

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Johnny runs a quiet little gambling house in a quiet district, and though he pays high for the privilege he is content with modest profits. He is as nearly on the "square" as any gambler can be and not go into bankruptcy, and has very desirable patronage; mostly middle-aged gentlemen of means who seek amusement and the opportunity to make what is called a "cleaning." The men who come, and some of them are young bloods bent on plunging, know they have a reasonable chance to win and they never complain if they lose.

It must be said to Johnny's credit that he had no idea of my real dexterity with cards, but I fancy he would let me play in his house anyway. Johnny is all gratitude. If one ever does him a favor, that one may become a pensioner on Johnny for life and will probably be remembered in his will.

It must also be said for my credit that I have never cheated anybody in Johnny's place that did not deserve it. I mean that they were either fellows who were trying to put over something a bit shady themselves, exchanging signals usually, or they were becoming too cocky because they happened to be winning everything in sight. Perhaps I must also say to my credit that at such times I never left the table without losing, usually to the heaviest losers, the chips taken in by my "questionable" methods.

But I do not deserve so very much credit for that, after all. The time has passed when I am badly in need of money. I can now afford to be honest. But I seldom question dishonesty that extends merely to money matters. Money getting is a shrewd game, full of kinks and tricks and legal rules which are in no sense honest since they leave the inexperienced rustic completely at the mercy of the perfectly legal financier.

But there are other forms of dishonesty—sheer stealing, for instance—which break the legal rules; and while I may have no particular sympathy with these forms—but let ministers explain why empty sacks can not long stand upright, then I shall be better able to tell why needy men when strongly tempted can not long remain honest. I am not defending thievery. Not at all. But I have defended and have helped many thieves, and I have not thrown in a dissertation on ethics with my help.

Johnny is a gambler and pays graft. But I like and trust him. He is a dapper little fellow with a square chin, and he talks as fast as marbles rattling down stair steps. He took me into his private office, which is about the size of a pigeonhole, and began to talk even before he shut the door.

"I hinted last night that Gaboreau had killed Kingston—which means he had him killed. Gaboreau's got three or four fellows, maybe more, who look like him. Tall, black-bearded, Frenchy fellows. The inspector's crazy because he can't touch Gaboreau. He's pretty sure he knows which is Gaboreau because only one goes into the house he's been having watched. He says he's absolutely got a line on three separate men that all look alike and pretend to be Gaboreau, and he's sure one of them is."

"But what about the Kingston murder?" I asked.

Kingston's death was a matter of intense interest at that time. Kingston was one of those men of immense wealth and notorious piety. He had been shot down through the window of his library and the police were desperately impoverished for clues.

"I'll tell you," said Johnny, "if you give me time. Gaboreau's got a new palace. Had it about six months. Clever. Private home—swell people live in it. See their name in the society paper every day. Inspector wouldn't tell me their name, but he told me that they rent the house from Kingston—or did. Gaboreau uses them for a blind. See the circle? Inspector says he knows Kingston heard about the gambling layout and had a fit and said he'd expose those swell tenants of his. Soon after that he was killed. Gaboreau didn't want to lose his swell new quarters or get his swell friends in bad. Either that or bump Kingston off, see? You know how long he'd hesitate.

"No, I don't know where that joint is. I've asked all around, quiet like, but it's well covered. Inspector says it's so exclusive only people with Dutch names are admitted.

"Further proof? Isn't any. That's enough, if you know Gaboreau. The inspector says right out that the police are afraid to take a chance and raid the joint. Says these tenants are big bugs with a pull right down the line. All the swells in town—the real swells—go there. Biggest thing ever put over. Leave it to Gaboreau!

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"But I tell you Mr. Everhard, if you've stepped on Gaboreau's foot you'd better take another trip to South Africa. I know you're used to trouble, and I haven't forgot what you did for me when that fellow swore out a lying affidavit about Mrs. Blix. But breaking in lone-handed to the district attorney's house, trussing him into a closet, stealing the affidavit and then kidnaping the —— liar that swore it out just to get at me, won't be nothing compared——"

"I didn't break in lone-handed, Johnny; or anything like lone-handed. And I very nearly stole everything in the place so that the district attorney wouldn't suspect what I was after. And you will remember that the police 'recovered' everything—everything—except some papers which the thieves had presumably lost. And as for kidnaping that fellow—remember, Johnny, I merely aided the sheriff from that little town down in Oklahoma who didn't care to monkey around with extradition proceedings. He knew the fellow was wanted for murder. That sheriff was a fine officer."

"You don't need to explain to me, Mr. Everhard. I know what you did for me. And I've never done anything for you."

"You will notice, Johnny, that I never hurt anybody much—not if I can help it. I usually tie them up so they will keep quiet until the game is over. That way they can't get in and steal the pot. Putting a gag into a man's mouth and sticking him into a closet, or setting Yang Li to watch him is just as effective as putting him into a coffin. And I can always let him go again, and he is usually so glad to be alive that he forgets all about the inconvenience."

"I know. I know. I know. You just play with rattlesnakes for the fun of it. But Gaboreau—he's one of those big snakes. What you call 'em? Boa something. The inspector's awfully close with his information. He come at me to find out what I knew about Gaboreau and dropped some information himself. I'll get more out of him, though—give me time. I know the inspector. He'll get disgusted one of these days and tell me all he thinks."

Then I spoke something of the little incident at the Oriel Café. And Johnny wondered what on earth could have caused Gaboreau—or any one of his impersonators—to have tried to get hold of the girl. It wasn't like Gaboreau to fool around with a stray girl.

"This Franklin De Mey," I asked, "ever hear of him?"

"Never," Johnny answered promptly. "But if he's stepped on Gaboreau's foot I can see where he's wise to keep out of sight."

"Did it occur to you," I asked, for Johnny has a keen mind and has had lots of experience, "that Gaboreau would not have done anything so clumsy as to follow and intrude upon that girl unless—well, unless he expected that she would go with him without protest? Not even all three or four or forty Gaboreaus would try to seize and carry off a girl on a street like that."

"Don't be too sure," Johnny suggested in tone of dubiousness as to what Gaboreau would do.

"Anyway, if Gaboreau knew who she was, and knew that through her he could have located this fellow De Mey—why wouldn't he have kept out of sight and followed her, or have had some one else follow her, just as he tried to do after he left me in the Oriel?"

Johnny said that he couldn't understand that either.

THANKS to the difference between Atlantic and Pacific time, all my telegrams were answered by midnight. The chief of police answered last, and said that he had no record of one Franklin De Mey.

The bank reported that Walter Guernsey's rating was high.

From the Chamber of Commerce I learned that Walter Guernsey was the junior in the Guernsey & Son Realty Investment Company, with big holdings throughout southern California. Guernsey, Sr., had practically retired from active work in the firm, and the son was the actual head.

The Times News Service answered that Guernsey had never been implicated in any kind of a scandal, but that he had figured in the papers as a racer up until a few years before. He had been one of the most daring and successful auto drivers among the amateurs of the State.

So with my telegrams at hand I meditated. Any one knows very well that a young man who is rated high by a bank, who is actively engaged in big business, too—

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which is something more than being rated by a bank because his father may give him a generous allowance—and who has distinguished himself in sport, is a man of good quality.

At least that is not the sort of a fellow who would send for a girl and then have some one else go for her because he was afraid to come out on the street after dark to meet a woman he loved or claimed to love.

I looked at the telegrams from many angles; and then a little after midnight I sent a telegram to Walter Guernsey himself. It was short and vague; yet explicit enough. It merely stated in so many words: "Jessie Dutton is here."

I designedly left it for Mr. Guernsey to take the initiative. I presented the information and waited to see what he would do with it. I was guessing from what Jessie had said that Mr. Guernsey would be much agitated by her absence. I thought I could tell much about the man, much more than I had learned from the bank, chamber of commerce, or newspaper, by the way he answered my message.

The answer came the next morning. I smiled for a long time after reading it. It was a model telegram; and I knew as soon as I glanced at it that Mr. Guernsey and I would not have any very serious disagreements. He had simply wired back: "I arrive Thursday."

That meant of course that he had looked up his train schedules, prepared to arrange for his absence from business, and also had made his decision with promptness. Thursday was less than a week away.

I have a weakness for men who are decisive and prompt. They often make mistakes, but they are the kind of people who never let such mistakes interfere with the main plan. There is a difference between haste and promptness. Haste shuts its eyes and leaps into the water. Promptness leaps as readily, but has its eyes on the life-buoy.

That afternoon I sent a personal to three newspapers. It was three fish-hooks that I was casting into the sea; and I hoped to get a nibble, even if I did not succeed in landing one Franklin De Mey.

They were blind personals, and the answers had to be made by mail. Also they were vague. Each said: "Jessie Dutton is alone. Friends please communicate."

I also moved through channels best known to myself to find out something about De Mey.

In one way or another several men have got themselves in debt to me. I do not mean in money matters. Money belongs to the higher reaches of the social state. Gratitude and loyalty among those who are friends to me is founded on something else. It is true that I have helped several people at one time and another with money, but the money was the least part of it. And I have found that there is no gratitude from any class of people that is so permanent, so selfless, so dependable, as that of crooks, who wish to turn to something more honorable—or safer, just as you please.

Among my friends was a huge burglar, or ex-burglar. Jerry Kelly had long been a crook and a bad one, from a certain point of view, and good one from another point of view. He tumbled into love with a girl who thought she saw possibilities in him and he turned to the ways of the righteous and became a drayman. Two weeks later he was pinched on suspicion and twenty years stared him in the face. That hurt Jerry very much. He was innocent. In the language of the day it got his goat.

Few people other than myself had known what it cost him in pride and money to become a drayman. He had taken his burglary as an art, a fine art; and though he had put over a number of little jobs without being arrested, still to be nabbed for one with which he had nothing to do made him disgusted with the world and its ways.

But Jerry had a good head and a great heart. He used the former at all times and the girl got to the latter. Jerry had used his fists on my behalf once upon a time when he did not suspect that my hands were in my pockets because two excellent automatics—cocked—were also there. A feather duster would have been a superfluous weapon when Jerry had finished with the three gentlemen who had thought it was my turn to seek an undertaker. Nevertheless, I felt obligated to Jerry. And when he was pinched he sent for me.

Perhaps what I did was not ethical, but Jerry was innocent. Details may be omitted; it is sufficient to remark that it was from my friend the police commissioner sitting in a private little game at the club that I extracted enough money to satisfy the particular inspector who could decide

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that after all the evidence wasn't sufficient to hold Jerry Kelly.

After that I had a hard time convincing Jerry that the strait and narrow path, taken from a drayman's perch, was really the better road. He suspected something of how I had got him out, for he was wise in the ways of justice and injustice; and the fact that I had, as he said, gone down the line for him, had much more effect in keeping him on the drayman's perch than my remarks to him on the utilitarian benefits of keeping straight.

Of course, he had lost his job in the meantime, and had to look about for another at a season when jobs were scarce. So, because I believe in poetic justice, when the police commissioner came at me again to win back what he had already lost, I collected enough more to tide Jerry over for about six weeks until he was able to find another dray. Jerry was appreciative.

I went to him and asked if he ever had heard of a Franklin De Mey.

He replied that he was not in touch with crooks much any more, for, as he said, the word had been passed that he was straight for keeps; but that he would inquire around.

"And any time I can ever do anything for you, Mr. Everhard—well, anything at anytime. That's me."

"Your turn will come Jerry," I told him.

"Can't come any too quick to suit me. The little lady is telling me every day or so that we must do something to pay Mr. Everhard back. No, she don't mean money, either. Money ain't everything——"

"Just find out for me who this Franklin De Mey is and we shall call everything square."

"I'll find out if it's findable, but we won't do no such thing!" he said.

THAT evening Vivian told me something of what Jessie had said through the day, and I gathered that she was wealthy, but that De Mey was immensely rich; or at least he had made Jessie think that he was.

She talked a great deal of the free way in which he had spent money. He had lived at the best hotels; he had driven the best car; he sent the best candy in the largest packages; and he had traveled and told of it entertainingly.

"He never," I asked of Jessie, "complained that through a misunderstanding at the bank he was temporarily short of funds and took a few dollars from you to help him over for a day or two?"

"Certainly not!" she flared at me.

And I saw I had missed my guess, or she had not hesitated to shield De Mey from my suspicion.

Also Jessie was worrying herself into a state of prostration over Franklin's possible dangers. She insisted that she must go to him—though she had not the faintest notion of which way to start to reach him.

"You don't think," I suggested to Vivian, "that this fellow De Mey is merely a bit of her imagination, do you? She is romantic, you know. She is as bad as the average at the age."

I was slapped for my aspersion on maidens of nineteen, and was scolded for my question; I was told that I was the meanest, most suspicious man that ever lived. Then I was kissed very daintily and quickly and my hands grabbed futilely at flying skirts as Vivian ran out of the room.

Yang Li brought me a new deck of cards, so I sat and practised, which I find is as good a way to mull over ideas as to sit with idle hands and look solemn.

I wished to know who it was that had leased the Kingston house and gone into partnership with Gaboreau.

So I telephoned an attorney with whom I had done some business in a purely formal way—that is, he was one of the people who knew me as a thoroughly respectable citizen—and asked him to do what he could to find out what houses the Kingston estate owned in the fashionable district, and to whom they had been leased.

I was sure there would not be many such houses, and it would be comparatively easy to sift the list and arrive pretty closely at the party I wanted.

The attorney, of course, did not know what I wanted the information for, but he said that he thought it could be easily secured. I told him, however, that I was in something of a hurry.

III

I RECEIVED many answers from the personals that I had put into the papers.

All of the answers were from men—all excepting one. A number of them wrote

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that they were sorry to see that Jessie Dutton was alone; and some offered to show her a good time. A few wanted to be a "father" to her. Every one seemed to think that she had put in the personal herself, which was exactly what I wanted De Mey to think if he read it.

But excepting one from the secretary of an organization designed to assist lonely girls, every answer was of such a nature as to show that the man writing it was sadly in need of somebody to punch his nose. However, I prefer to use my head rather than my hands. Besides it was a little too much to undertake such wholesale punitive measures against the noses of so many; so I contented myself with hiring a public stenographer to answer each letter and to make an appointment in the name of Jessie Dutton in the same block at the same time with each of the mashers. Each was to wear a red necktie and a carnation in his buttonhole so she could recognize him. They were to meet her between six-thirty and seven and to wait in case she was a little late.

I thought it as good a plan as any to teach "suckers" not to nibble at the bait I had thrown to catch a shark. At least I had an idea that De Mey was a shark. I don't know how the assignation turned out. I only know that subsequent letters were written by some who had kept the appointment; some were stupid enough, as mashers usually are, to think that a mistake had unintentionally been made since Miss Dutton did not appear.

But the letter that I wanted did not appear. No one answered giving the faintest inkling that he knew who Miss Dutton was. No one referred to Franklin De Mey. It seemed that Gaboreau had abandoned the girl, or else taken other means of locating her. And De Mey himself either did not read the papers or was afraid to write.

I had furnished postage so that all the letters might be mailed to me by the newspapers, and I would not have to send around for them. I had done this to hide trace of myself for any watcher who might loiter about to see who called for them. I did not care much whether any one found out that I had Miss Dutton under my wing.

But on the fourth day I received a letter addressed to Mr. Donald Everhard direct. It was unsigned. The party writing it may, or may not, have got my address from some clerk in the newspapers' business offices. It was the most feasible way of getting it, however. It said:

> We know who you are and it will go hard with you if you don't do as we say herein. Let Jessie Dutton carry a pair of red gloves and be at the entrance of the Oriel Café at eight o'clock Friday night. You will get yours if this is not done.

It was signed with a black dagger drawn through a bleeding heart.

I am afraid that I smiled when I saw the would-be sinister signature. Daggers and bleeding hearts on paper never disturbed me much.

The letter was short but sufficient. The writer could not possibly have worded it more effectively to keep me from following instructions. I would not have turned Jessie over to a man who was the kind of a fellow to write such a letter. Had the note been gentlemanly, I might have done what seemed necessary to keep the appointment.

I had a suspicion that the writer was one of the mashers who had thought to get some information by writing her without letting it appear that that was what he was up to; and no doubt he had been one of many to keep the appointment I made, and had been greatly peeved when he saw the others who came with red ties and red carnations. I surmised this largely because of the instruction that she should wear red gloves. "Red" was no doubt on his mind; for red gloves are something rarely seen outside of a comic opera.

I had no way of telling whether the letter came from Gaboreau or De Mey. I was sure that it came from one or the other; and was inclined to believe that the latter was responsible. Gaboreau's threats, I reasoned, would be more impressive. Gaboreau might use the black dagger and bleeding heart as a signature, for many people are terrified by such things; but he would hardly write as a threat: "You will get yours if this is not done."

I gave the letter to Yang Li; he looked at it, grinned and filed it in a scrap-book with our other threatening letters.

Vivian calls Yang Li my bird of ill omen, which is a misnomer. Yang is a mute Chinaman. I have known him for years and he remains as mysterious as ever. He has told me nothing about himself, yet he can read and write English after a fashion. He is a peculiar fellow with a strange sense of alertness. I have never seen him sleep.

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He has the dog's faculty for watchfulness. Enter his room as quietly as you please at any hour of the night, and Yang's eyes will be open.

After all, he is perhaps just a common, inscrutable Chinaman, but worth his weight in diamonds. He does exactly what he is told to do, asks no questions and gives no explanations.

We first met in San Francisco after a tong war. Yang's friends had got much the worst of it. Some time before that somebody had cut out his tongue as though Yang had a secret they wished to have guarded forever. I suspected that Yang had once been in the service of a ceremonious dignitary, a viceroy, or maybe in some Peking palace. He punctiliously went through a lot of rigmarole like bowing and saluting and standing immobile when being spoken to.

He came to me as a servant and we got along fine. But Vivian had not liked having him around; she said that his noiselessness made her nervous. You might be sitting in a room with your eyes open, yet the first thing you knew Yang would be standing within a few feet of your face.

But after trying to do without him, I had persuaded Vivian into letting Yang come back. I liked to have him around, and his particular job was to watch over Vivian. It would take a regiment of hussars to look after her properly. Yang, with the long knife of his that he wears up the left capacious sleeve, does very well. When I am away from the house I know no one will get in.

AS IT was Thursday I saw that I would have a busy day. So I went shopping and bought a pair of red gloves and visiting a hair-dresser's succeeded in getting a wig that suited me; bought some theater tickets, and laid the preparations for receiving Mr. Guernsey between seven and eight. A subsequent telegram from him had told me that he would arrive about seven-fifteen.

I knew that a man who had raced across the country at a moment's notice would not linger long before reaching the address at which he hoped to find the girl.

I sent Jessie and Vivian to the theater. I sent Yang Li along, without their knowledge, to see that they were not molested. Yang hated street clothes, he looked and felt awkward in them, but nevertheless he could make himself inconspicuous and watchful. I felt there was no risk in letting them go, even alone; though I was less inclined to be easy about letting them return alone. I promised to meet them after the show and have a bite of supper with them.

Try as I did, I could not hurry them off to the theater. I was anxious that they should be out of the house before Mr. Guernsey arrived. At last they got away, and I took out my red gloves and wig and contemplated the things with a mixture of amusement and apprehension.

Then the telephone rang, and my attorney called up to say that he had found that Kingston's estate owned three houses which might be said to lie in the fashionable district; but there was really only one that was on the avenue. It was not generally known that Kingston owned the house at all. In fact the De Meyervelts were supposed to be the owners of that home as well as of other property.

"De Meyervelts?" I said, thinking quickly of some one else.

I elicited from him the information that the De Meyervelts were prominent socially. They were not intimate with the so-called "best" people—so-called for what reason I know not—but they succeeded in getting themselves invited occasionally to quite exclusive affairs, and were always making a splurge on the society pages. They passed, however, among the people who were not posted on social heraldry as members of the Four Hundred. They were not, according to my legal authority. They were on the outskirts. The second generation of the De Meyervelts would probably be, if they married well, at the hub of the social wheel; but at present the family was just about inside the rim.

I thanked him for his information and promptness.

"De Meyervelt?" I said to myself. "De Meyervelt—De Mey—Franklin De Meyer-velt."

I sent one of the boys in the apartment-house office out to a drug store to look up the De Meyervelt family in the directory. And I was surprised to have him report that no such name as Frank or Franklin was given.

I called up the society editor of the *Herald* and found that the directory, though she knew nothing of Franklin, had omitted

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the names of several members of the De Meyervelt family. But I could not get a trace of Franklin.

It seemed to me something more than a coincidence, in which, as I have said, I have little faith, that De Mey, who feared—or said that he did—Gaboreau, should very nearly have the same name as the family which had presumably profited by a murder credited to Gaboreau.

Further inquiries that night were abruptly ended by the arrival of Mr. Guernsey.

"My name is Guernsey," he said with a touch of aggressive directness.

I looked him over carefully. Mr. Guernsey was not a particularly handsome man, but the marks of the solid, aggressive fellow were there on his face. He was not old, either. I liked his appearance though his nose had at some time been broken and not as skilfully set as the one who owned a broken nose might wish. He was not tall but rather chunky; he had a heavy jaw and dark hair and gray eyes.

"My name is Everhard," I replied, putting out my hand.

He took it, but rather dubiously. I asked him to sit down but he looked about instead and asked brusquely—

"Where is Miss Dutton?"

I told him that she was not in at present.

"Where is she?"

I said nothing but looked at him. He was suspicious, and inclined to be unmannerly. Then I asked him again to sit down.

"I came to see Miss Dutton," he said, lifting his voice challengingly.

I looked at him a bit harder, and I think he understood that it was not the time or place to grow noisy. Again I asked him to sit down. And he sat.

"Is she all right?" he asked impatiently.

"No," I said maliciously, "she is not."

Instantly he was back on his feet, demanding in a loud voice that carried some menace and some of the distracted lover's anguish to know what was the matter.

"Very much the matter," I said.

He caught his breath and listened intently, expecting me to go on. I hesitated.

"Tell me, man, tell me. What is the matter?"

"She is in love with a fellow called Franklin De Mey. Who is he?"

I sent the last three words at him suddenly.

"Has he got her? Where is she? I'll break his —— neck! Has she married him? Did he bring her here. Tell me—tell me—can't you see that I am half crazy?"

I told him that I could.

That quieted him down somewhat. He was not by nature an emotional fellow; or what is usually called emotional by those who think Frenchmen are emotional because they so readily make a fuss. I have usually found that there is as much fire in a quiet man as in a noisy one; and Mr. Guernsey was not inclined by nature to be noisy. I could see that plainly enough; but he was sadly wrought up by his love for a slip of a red-haired girl who I found was tedious to be with. I can understand the madness that Vivian had inspired in more than one person — but red-haired maidens, never! I did not intend to hold a controversy in esthetics with him; so I asked again—

"Who is Franklin De Mey?"

"I don't know. He's a bounder that popped up in Los Angeles last Summer. I tried to look him up but couldn't find a thing."

"Is he handsome?" I asked a bit maliciously.

"No!" and Mr. Guernsey replied with the emphasis of disgust.

"Is he brave?"

Mr. Guernsey seemed to perceive that I was asking as much to torment him as to find out about De Mey. He said:

"Oh, De Mey might beat up a cripple—a little one. That's the way I sized him up, anyway. But where is Miss Dutton?"

"That was not the name I met her under," I said testing the gentleman's nerves a little further.

"Has she married that whelp?" he shouted at me.

"No. Not yet."

Then I told him of how I had met her at the Oriel Café when she dropped into a vacant chair at my table, and of the black-bearded man that came up and spoke to her.

"I'd like to have been there. I'd have punched his head for him!"

And I was convined that he meant it.

"Did you ever hear of Gaboreau, of Antoine Gaboreau?"

"Never. What do you make of it, Mr. Everhard?"

We talked for some time, and I told him

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practically everything. I showed him the threatening letter with the black dagger for a signature; and spoke of how all effort to locate De Mey had failed, and in conclusion I said:

"I make of it simply this, which isn't a very profound deduction I will admit. De Mey is either with or against Gaboreau. But in neither case can I understand why Gaboreau should have displayed the interest he has in just the way he has. I fancy that De Mey's love is largely centered around the girl's pocketbook. She is wealthy, is she not?"

"Not so very," Mr. Guernsey said with some satisfaction.

"She appears to think that she is."

"Her father was, but he didn't leave much. And that has been badly managed. She has enough to live on and all that—but wealthy, no."

"And De Mey—he showed symptoms of wealth, I understand."

"He did spend a lot of money—but a lot of people do that for a Summer. It's no sign they can do it next Summer. He splashed, yes. I don't call any man wealthy who rents a car. He did. Always had the same make—but a different car frequently. I know. I know cars. But I want to see Jessie."

I told him that I did not think he had better see her; and he became rather excited again. He vowed he would see her; that there was going to be trouble if he did not see her; that he was going to talk some of that nonsense out of her head and take her right back with him. He looked at me suspiciously and he hinted—hinted vaguely but pointedly enough that I had an ax to grind, and intimated that I in asking my question regarding the state of her finances had not been totally disinterested.

I have much more patience than I have been credited with; so I listened without making a gesture of protest until he had finished. Then I asked him to sit down again. He resumed the chair and sat rather stiffly, waiting to see what I would say.

"If I haven't misunderstood," I remarked, "you are in love."

He made no reply, but looked as though he could bite my head off and would enjoy doing so.

"Do you want to win her or kidnap her?"

"I don't care. I want to get her out of trouble," he snapped.

"A laudable and gallant ambition, Mr. Guernsey. But she chances to be sufficiently old to be supposed to know her own mind. She ran away from you, I suspect, as much as she ran to this fellow De Mey."

"I don't understand."

"Perhaps you will if I am permitted to continue. She has frequently and repeatedly told me that she wished to avoid you. That you continually talk of marrying her. And all her waking hours have been given over to expressing worry about and love for a man other than yourself—a mysterious man, who we are agreed in thinking is probably a scoundrel. But if she sees you now or soon, and knows what you want, she will be more obstinate than ever.

"I don't know much about women, but I know you can not *make* them do anything. If you show them the error of their way, you must do it indirectly. If you convince them of anything, you must let them think that they arrived at their conclusions by their own intuition. They are very proud of that vague quality called 'intuition.'

"And Mr. Guernsey, if you were to carry her back home now she would always regard you as her enemy, as one who had spoiled the romance of her life, and she would enjoy a lot of sentimental sorrow such as most women nurse all through their lives if they fail to get the man they want. But if we can possibly locate this Franklin De Mey and uncover his mystery, I believe he will not then look so attractive to her.

"You know and I know that there is pretty sure to be something shady about him. It is barely possible that he has offended Gaboreau and has taken to a dark cellar for the good of his health. I expect to look Monsieur Gaboreau up within a few days and shall make a few direct inquiries of him. But for the present, you must keep out of sight."

Did he believe me? Scarcely a word. He thought that I was trying to trick him in some way. He showed about as much sense as men usually do when in love; but he did agree that if all the facts I had reported were true, it would be best for him to remain out of sight. The "fact" to which he took exception, however, was in my statement that Jessie would not want to see him.

I let him express himself as freely as he

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pleased, then told him that he would pay dearly for his foolishness.

He insisted upon coming to the theater with me to meet Vivian and Jessie, though he promised to keep out of sight on the way home. We arranged that he should then enter my room and play eavesdropper so that he could hear what was being said in the next room; though I warned him that he would hear much that was unpleasant to his ears. But he insisted, and I did not waste breath in trying to dissuade him.

WE WENT to the theater together, and when Mr. Guernsey was hurrying out of the foyer as the crowd started to come through the door, he bumped into a little, slim man, whose clothes did not seem to fit him and whose almond eyes showed not a flicker of annoyance. Yang Li drew aside also for he knew that Vivian would be angry if she knew that he was watching over her. But he slipped a card into my pocket and when I looked at it, I saw the figure "2."

That meant that Yang Li had spotted two people who seemed to have been following Vivian and Jessie. But I knew that nothing would come of it that night; though it was well to be assured that there was some risk if either of the young women ventured out alone.

I met them, and we went to supper.

I smiled as I thought of the estimable Mr. Guernsey, highly rated by the banks of his city, adapting himself to the exigencies of a "shadower."

His patience, however, was equal to the occasion; and he no doubt had plenty of opportunity to assure himself that Jessie was not unhappy in the company of Vivian and myself.

When we returned to the apartment, I succeeded in smuggling him into my room. He told me nervously that some one else had been following us, too. He said there were two fellows; but from the way he looked at Yang Li, who slipped by us and disappeared into his own cubbyhole of a room, I knew that Mr. Guernsey had not detected the third man that had also followed. I believe Yang could evade observation if he were to be set down on a vacant lot.

But Mr. Guernsey was still desirous of playing the eavesdropper. No doubt he wished to hear Jessie's sweet voice. I gave him the opportunity.

Vivian was sleepy and Jessie was too. But Jessie could easily be persuaded to talk about herself and the beloved Franklin. She seemed to forget him now and then and be rather contented; but once his name was mentioned, she worried and chattered in the way that young women are supposed to fret and talk about an imperiled lover.

However, I kept my questions more or less around the name of Mr. Guernsey and really had an absorbing half-hour. She repeated that Mr. Guernsey was old, dull and prosaic, that he bored her to death though no doubt he really tried to make himself agreeable. But in no way was he comparable to Frank.

"This Mr. Guernsey must be a pretty good sort of a fellow, though," I said.

"Oh, he's all right, but *so* dull."

"Didn't you ever like him?"

"Yes," she said slowly, "but that was before I met Franklin—" and she had to tell more about the paragon.

"Don't you still like Mr. Guernsey?" I asked; and Vivian somewhat mystified looked at me.

She could not understand why I was asking such pointless questions, and repeating them.

"As a friend, of course. He's all right, only Frank—" and away she went again.

"Don," Vivian said suddenly, "I believe there's somebody in your room!"

I laughed at her, though I was sorry that she had been startled by the muffled expression of disgust which had come through the keyhole.

"I am sure I heard something," she insisted.

"I'll look," I said, "but nobody could get in there with Yang in the house."

I opened the door and pretended to look about. Mr. Guernsey was grinding his teeth. He could not speak for he knew that he would be heard; but his eyes were eloquent. No, he was not an emotional man—he was simply much wrought up. And he indicated that he now knew it would not be best for the girl to catch sight of him. I reported to Vivian that she must have an overdeveloped imagination.

Fortunately Vivian is not easily alarmed, so she did not insist that she had heard anything suspicious. But Jessie, who had been so busy talking that she had heard nothing but her own words, was much perturbed by the possibility of any one being in

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the apartment, and even showed excitement after I had convinced her that all was safe and secure.

I resumed my questions and Jessie resumed her speeches about Mr. Guernsey and Mr. Franklin De Mey.

A few minutes later Vivian started up exclaiming:

"Don—there was somebody, too! I just heard the door close!"

Mr. Guernsey would not have made a good burglar. He lacked technical skill. In sneaking out he had closed the door with a click loud enough to be heard in a boiler factory.

I jumped up and rushed into the next room.

Jessie caught hold of Vivian and began saying little hysterical things while they both followed me.

I ran through my room and out into the hall as though in pursuit of some one. I wanted to tell Guernsey to hurry and get away in case he still lingered. But he had disappeared. So I was able to be truthful in reporting that I saw no one; and, after looking over the room, in saying that nothing had been disturbed.

"I must have had a bad case of nerves," Vivian said dubiously. "I could have sworn that I heard some one."

I smiled and lightly dismissed the click of the door, or tried to. But Jessie declared that she also had heard the door close. I tried to explain that the show must have been too melodramatic and have put them into a highly agitated condition.

Vivian told me that it was precious little I knew about either nerves or melodrama, for the show to which I had bought tickets for them had been a musical comedy. She was not satisfied that no one had been in the room, and in looking about discovered the red gloves and wig which I had left on my desk.

Vivian pounced upon them at once.

"Aha! There was somebody, too! She left her gloves. Horrors, what taste! Don, explain yourself. Who put these ghastly things on your desk? I could pull every hair out of her head—see, I can even think I have done it"—and she brandished the red wig.

Jessie saw mystery compounded with mystery for she believed that some one had actually left the gloves and wig.

"My dear," I said to Vivian, "that is a little present I bought for you. Tomorrow evening between the hours of seven and eight you will wear them for a block or so——"

"Never!"

"Oh yes. Red gloves and a beautiful red wig——"

"Horrible! Such a combination!"

"And you will borrow the suit and coat Jessie has."

"Don, are you serious?" she asked quickly beginning to see method in my madness.

"Entirely my dear. You must keep the appointment alone. I will follow as close as I can in a taxi."

Then I told her something of what had happened, omitting however the threat contained in the letter for that sort of thing never failed to make Vivian uneasy—which was about the only thing I know of that would. "But red hair and those awful gloves!" she protested as she stood on her tiptoes and raised her lips to my face.

IV

THE next morning an early telephone call came from the pained and humble Mr. Guernsey. He apologized for his suspicion of me, and with a sense of humor that I had hardly credited him with remarked that I had fixed him "good and proper." He said that he now saw that the best thing he could do was to stay out of sight.

"De Mey must have her hypnotized," he suggested.

Hypnotism has taken the place among us that magic had among the ancients. In the olden days it was said that a man bewitched a maid when she seemed to prefer a worthless suitor for one of stalwart merit; but now we say that the scoundrel has her hypnotized; and we find in the term great consolation, for it presupposes that the girl has through no fault of her own lost control of her will. Perhaps not one person in a thousand is truly serious in suggesting hypnotism as an explanation; but as a usual thing such a person gets all the consolation out of the term without having faith in it.

Guernsey was determined to find De Mey. Since he knew something of how much Jessie cared for him, Guernsey was more positive than ever that the fellow must be a scoundrel. I have often wondered why it is

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a woman never seems able to inspire love in two decent, honorable men at the same time. All stories testify that one of the wooers must be a rascal; and every wooer believes the other fellow to be the rascal. In this case, however, I entirely agreed with Guernsey's opinion of De Mey.

"I want to offer a reward for that fellow," he said. "Put it in the papers. I'm going after him right."

"Yes, and scare him to death. Make him retreat further into his hole," I suggested sarcastically.

"Well, go to the police then. They ought to know something."

"They ought to, yes. But the police have a habit of pretending ignorance when they are wise; and of pretending to hold evidence when they are wholly up in the air. If you tell them the story they will probably say that they can't see any cause for their interference."

"What the devil are we to do?" he asked.

"Do you ever gamble?"

"Gamble? Sure. I'm in the real estate business. I don't mind taking a chance, if that's what you mean."

"Partly. Do you play poker, roulette—anything?"

"Never won anything, but I know one card from another. But I'm game."

"Well, you are no good as a burglar. Both my wife and the girl heard you close the door last night. Yang Li could have run through the house and slammed every door and nobody would have heard him. There are men like that. Jerry Kelly for instance, whom you may meet later on if this affair grows complicated. But you are not one of the kind. But I thought you might try your hand as a gambler. Are you willing to lose a little to pose as a sport?"

"Is it for her?" he asked, puzzled.

"Yes. All a part of the game."

"I'm on. I don't see the point, but I think I'll take your word for it after this. You certainly rubbed it into me last night. I came near biting that door-knob off!"

"All right, we shall work as sleuths then. I think you will be better as a detective than as a burglar. It doesn't mean so much if you fail as a sleuth. I would do it myself, but though I am not well known in this city by any means, still there are probably a few people with whom I have no speaking acquaintance that know me, and they might be suspicious. But you are a stranger. During the day I am going to find means of introducing you to our most exclusive gambling club. I'll meet you late this afternoon and give you the details."

I went into the cubbyhole that Yang Li used for a room and found him as usual squatted on the floor with a package of cigarets by his side. In his eyes was the far-away stare of one who dreams of things that may not be spoken. He possesses the true Oriental patience. Hours mean nothing to him; the clock is merely a contrivance which keeps people from forgetting themselves, and he seems never to notice what goes on around its face.

When in the house he wears the blouse and trousers of his country, and the soft felt slippers. And sometimes when he raises his hand to his lips to place or remove a cigaret, one may catch the glint of what appears to be a polished piece of wood in the sleeve of his left arm. That is the handle of a long knife, scarcely thicker in its blade than a razor, but two and a half times as long and tapering to the needle's point.

Men who have had experience with both weapons have told me that they stood more in fear of a knife than of a gun. Of course, that depends on who has the gun. It is true that awkward hands use the knife more effectively than the gun. I would rather have five hands coming at me with knives than have one man standing away and holding a gun if he could use it as well as myself; but I am inclined to think that I would rather have five ordinary men with guns trying to put an end to my usefulness than have Yang similarly inspired with that long, sinister, glittering blade of his. Every man knows how eagerly a razor bites into his flesh, as though the thing were actually animated with desire to get to blood: Yang's blade is the apotheosis of the blood-thirsting razor.

As I came into the little room, Yang rose to his feet. He got up simply by straightening his legs beneath him and lifting his body; not by climbing first to his hands and pushing up his back, as people of the Occident do when they have squatted. He stood attentively while I said one or two short sentences, then raised both hands, palm outward to his forehead and bowed. It seemed to me a rather ridiculous courtesy, but I took it seriously as I always did. If I should have to put my life into somebody's

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hands other than my own, I would choose those frail yellow hands of Yang's.

I had told him not to let either of the women out of his sight; and I hoped that it would not be difficult for him to obey, as I had asked Vivian, and practically ordered Jessie, to stay at home. If I had wanted Vivian to go out on to the street and wander about, I could have got her to do so by simply ordering her not to go outside her room.

I HAD a double, perhaps a triple mission, with Johnny Blix. I talked over matters rather freely with him; and he had tried to locate the elusive Franklin De Mey, feeling much as I did that the name bore too close a resemblance to De Meyervelt to be an accident.

He had also taken the trouble to find out that De Meyervelt's was the home where Gaboreau had established his gambling layout; and when Johnny had quietly let the inspector become aware that the De Meyervelt house and its secret were known to him, the inspector had loosened up with more information about Gaboreau.

But before I let Johnny get started to talking I told him what I wanted to do with Guernsey. I told Johnny that he must scout around until some one was found who had entrance to the De Meyervelt house and would be willing to take a young friend of mine recently from Los Angeles.

Johnny usually had two or three gay youngsters in debt to him, though the real "swells" were not his steady patrons; and he said that he thought that by wiping the slate clean he could persuade somebody either to take Guernsey or to introduce him to some one who would.

"It's not easy, Mr. Everhard. That De Meyervelt joint is watched like a pawnbroker's safe. They're particular. Players are received as guests of the De Meyervelts, you know. The gambling layout is supposed to be for the amusement of the guests. Clever. Takes brains to operate like that and get away with it."

"I've told Mr. Guernsey that he will be expected to lose," I said.

"Wise-O. It'd look bad if he was to win. See that, don't you? Strangers never ought to win. Makes people suspicious. Attracts attention. You don't want no more attention attracted from Gaboreau than you can help, Mr. Everhard. He's a bad one. The bad one. I've found out some more about him."

"One of the things I particularly want, Johnny, is to know how and where I can get in touch with Gaboreau without breaking in upon any of his secret haunts."

"Easy. I was just going to tell you what the inspector loosened up with when I sprung on him the De Meyervelts. Could have knocked him over. That's the way with the cops. They think nobody knows anything about anything they've had a hard time learning.

"Inspector much as told me—did tell in fact—that he don't think he'll be able to hang anything on Gaboreau about Kingston's murder. First place there's too many Gaboreaus. Inspector says that he knows of three, and he thinks there's another one or two. Can't get the goods on any of them. Beats the devil. I wish you'd drop that Gaboreau stuff, Mr. Everhard. That fellow don't buy off the police. He just bluffs 'em out.

"Inspector thinks the real headquarters is 22 Stillwater Place. He's been having it watched day and night for two weeks. Just called off the dicks yesterday. Says there's nothing more to learn by watching an old man and two women that are stone deaf. Cook and a maid and an old servant the inspector says.

"But here's the point. One black-beard comes out every morning. Sometimes at four, sometimes at six. Always shows up about the time the game is over at the De Meyervelts. Of course, the inspector can't get anybody into the De Meyervelt house. He's tried it. But anybody can spot a plain-clothes man as far as he can see him. You know. They all look alike. But he's had men out in front of the house watching, and about an hour after the party busts up, then a black-beard shows up at Stillwater Place. See? But nobody ever sees Mr. Blackbeard leave the De Meyervelt house. Sees him come all right. Usually comes from the Tremaine——"

"The Tremaine Hotel?" I interrupted.

"Sure. That's the funny part. Inspector says his men have seen as many as three black-beards go into the Tremaine before one came out. Get me? But never sees any two together."

"And that fellow that goes into the Stillwater place at five or six in the morning usually leaves about eight or nine and goes

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to the Tremaine. Then from the time he arrives till about midnight there is Mr. Black-beard hanging around the lobby. When does he sleep? That's the point. See? There's three or four of these black-beards, all of 'em look alike and they switch around on schedule so that nobody ever sees two of them at the same place, or can locate any two of them at the same time."

"What did the inspector find out at Still-water Place?"

"Nothing, I've been telling you. The servants are deaf and won't talk. The old man—butler or something, the inspector says, never leaves the house."

"The detectives didn't manage to get in and look around?"

"Who ever heard of a detective getting any place without breaking down the door?" Johnny answered scornfully.

"And if I want to see Gaboreau I am to go to the Tremaine?"

"That's the ticket. He loafs around there from eight or nine in the morning until midnight."

"The Tremaine," I said, "is where De Mey had his letters sent. Remember?"

"That's what you said. I remember now. Humph—funny."

"And the Tremaine clerk said he never heard of Franklin De Mey. Johnny, do you think it possible that Gaboreau is impersonating this fellow De Mey? There was such a fellow out at Los Angeles—but maybe he has been done for—bumped off and Gaboreau is playing his part."

"Might be. Gaboreau would do it if there was anything in it for him. If you'll take the advice of a friend, Mr. Everhard, you'll lay off that gang. They're bad. They're too clever to be caught. They're the only crooks I ever heard of that don't bungle. Brains back of them. Police can't touch 'em."

"The police are handicapped, Johnny. They play the game according to rules. They have to have evidence and warrants before they make a move. That is all right in a way, and is designed to save decent citizens from annoyance. But it also is a great advantage for the crooks. I have no such scruples. I don't play the game according to the rules of evidence and warrants. If I suspect a man I give him the chance to explain—that's all. I don't wait till I can *prove* something on him, as the police have to do. I think I'll pay a call at the Tremaine and ask Mr. Gaboreau a few questions."

And I did. I had scarcely stepped into the lobby before I saw the same man, or at least I supposed it the same man, that I had spoken with at the Oriel.

He was sitting alone in a leather chair watching the people. I walked up to him and stopped. He looked at me but gave not an inkling of recognition, and apparently expected me to pass on. But I did not.

"Monsieur Gaboreau?" I said, stressing the "Monsieur."

"Yes, monsieur," he answered with a glint in his eye and stood up.

He was a taller man than I, and I am not short. He was politely attentive, and searched my face with his dark eyes. His hat was on, and his thick, black beard closely trimmed, permitted me to see scarcely more than his nose and eyes. But I felt sure that he was the same man I had met a few nights before.

"What can I do for you, monsieur?" he asked.

We stared at each other for some moments. I never feel uncomfortable or rude when I take the time before speaking to look a man over carefully. Then I asked—

"You do not remember me?"

He appeared a little puzzled.

"Ah, yes—I seem to—but so many people—your face is familiar. Yes. Sometimes a name slips my memory—but a face never. I remember your face quite well. Now wait. Let me think——"

I let him think all that he pleased. No doubt he expected that I would hasten to tell him my name and the place where we had met, as people invariably do when they feel that they have been forgotten and wish to jog the memory of the one who has forgotten them.

My silence did not assist him in the least.

"My wretched memory," he said with a slight effort at a humorous tone, "is playing me false. Just a word, monsieur. Just one word and it will all come back to me."

I spoke not one word, but three. I said—

"Franklin De Mey."

The gentleman was an artist at self-control. But we were standing less than three feet apart and I could see his face too closely to miss the slightest muscular reaction of even his eyelids. Just for an instant only—the briefest of instants, if there can be such a thing—he showed the merest trace of

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surprise. But the flash of light in his dark eyes was sufficient to let me see that at last I had thrown the mysterious name of Franklin De Mey upon comprehending ears; the first pair of ears that my assiduous questing had discovered.

But he at once assumed, or tried to assume, the appearance of one who is not sure that he has heard correctly.

"Franklin Deming?" he asked. "Did you say that your name was Franklin Deming, monsieur?"

I took my time about denying that I had said anything of the kind.

"Franklin De Mey," I replied. "De M-e-y."

He hesitated. I was sure that he felt himself to be in rather a tight place, and he didn't know whether or not to acknowledge that the name meant anything to him. But discretion evidently seemed to him the wiser thing, and knowing that he could readily plead that his discretion had caused him to act strangely in case he found that I really did have a right to inquire about De Mey, he again pretended not to understand.

"Did you say, monsieur, that your name was Franklin De Mey?"

"No."

I said that one word and waited. He waited, too. So we stood and looked at each other for some time. Then he broke the silence and showed that his patience was also being strained.

"I do not understand, monsieur. You say your name is not Franklin De Mey. May I ask what it is?"

I avoided his question and explained:

"I asked about Franklin De Mey. Do you know him?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon, monsieur. I misunderstood. No. I do not know Monsieur De Mey."

He started to turn away, yet seemed curious as to why I had approached him.

"Jeannette Deering—do you know of her?"

His attitude changed from suavity to one of open irritation. He indicated by his manner that he thought it presumptuous of me to be asking direct questions of him. He answered shortly, as he started again to turn away:

"No. You have evidently made a mistake."

"Evidently," I retorted. "But it was because I thought your memory long enough to reach from here to the Oriel Café!"

That remark at least struck a sensitive spot in his memory. He was assuredly not the gentleman with whom I had had the few words in the Oriel, but he had heard something of those words, though perhaps the name Jeannette Deering had not been among them.

"Who are you?" he asked quickly and pointedly.

I saw no reason for allowing him to believe that I knew he was not the fellow who had approached our table that night. Since the Gaboreaus—or whoever they were—were at such pains to merge four persons into one identity, I preferred to make him think that I believed he had been pretending not to recognize me.

When he asked who I was I gave him an answer definite enough and yet calculated to rub his sleek fur the wrong way. There was something remarkably like the cat about him, too, as there had been about the other fellow. And I hate cats. I said—

"I was the escort of the girl you approached in a mysterious fashion—and to whom you apologized."

I had to add the last. I could not forego the pleasure of letting him know that his brother black-beard had apologized.

But it was my turn to be puzzled when he suddenly pretended to have remembered me and to recognize me. He laughed easily, or what he wished me to think was easily, as though our first encounter had been something of a joke. But I too vividly remembered the parting stare he had given me—or that rather the other fellow had given me over his shoulder when leaving. He insisted that I should come up stairs with him to his room where he could talk it over. And I went.

No doubt he smiled a little when I so abruptly refused the courtesy of entering his room first, and insisted upon following him through the door. Any one who knows me knows that I never take chances. I am always very careful and cautious; and I particularly object to running the risk of having my head cracked from the rear with a billy. It is bad enough to be struck from the front; but I much prefer to have the attack come from that direction.

THE room was comfortably furnished, as any room at the Tremaine would be; but there was little to indicate that its occupant was more than a transient. Table and chairs were in it; but

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the absence of a bed denoted that another room was also in use.

He asked me to excuse him for a minute, and I said certainly. He went into another room.

I did not sit down, but took the precaution to stand away from any one of the doors and to have my back to the wall. I am not like Yang Li: I can not tell if there is any one behind me unless I see him. That Chinaman, however, seems to have ocular faculties at the back of his head.

The man had hardly left the room before he returned; that is, the man who came into the room with me had hardly excused himself and gone through a door before another man who looked like his twin brother came in. The second one was evidently the fellow with whom I had had the encounter at the Oriel.

Which was the real Gaboreau I could not surmise. I could not even have proved that they were different men. The second seemed a trifle shorter, and there was an intangible difference between them. They were both sleek, suave, polite, cold—cunning fellows. I might never have known that there were two men if I had let the first one I met understand who I was instead of keeping him puzzled. He would no doubt then have hurried me up stairs and turned me over to his fellow blackbeard and twin brother—I supposed that it was a twin brother—by the simple device of excusing himself and going through a door and permitting the other man to come in as though he were re-entering.

He took up the cue just where the other had dropped it. He spoke again of his tricky memory, and reproached himself very severely for having been, as he said, so dense when we first met. Would I kindly pardon him and explain just what it was that he could do for me? And he was pleased to see that I had come to him, for now we could talk matters over and reach an understanding. The affair at the Oriel had been purely a misunderstanding. He wished to apologize. He had made a mistake. If he had known where to locate me he would have tendered apologies long ago. And just what was it I wanted?

I came to the essential point.

"I want to ask just why you wanted that girl?"

His nimble brain and tongue worked smoothly.

"Why, monsieur, I just told you that it had all been a mistake. The lady was with you all evening. You know that. Unfortunately, I took Miss Deering for some one else—some one with whom I have important business. It is so important, monsieur, that I must be pardoned for not explaining it to you. But of course you would not be interested. And you must have thought me a great fool indeed—as Miss Deering was with you all evening."

Indeed, he was a capable man with his lips. And his very apologetic words were so arranged as to mock me. He knew that I knew that he knew that I knew Miss Deering had not been with me all evening, or anything of the kind. Yet he meant to score decisively a point by pretending to believe the girl had been with me all evening. I could not very well ask him who he thought "Miss Deering" was, since he had so neatly turned the tables on me. But there were several things I could say to him.

"Her name is not Jeannette Deering at all. In fact, she is a young woman who has been warned to look out for you, if your name is Gaboreau, as you said a few minutes ago. And she knew from whom she was running when she dropped into the chair at my table. Very strange, is it not, that you should actually be looking for some other woman and mistake her for one who really knew you and was afraid of you—mistake her for some one with whom you had business?"

He could not, he said, in the least understand how such a strange coincidence had been brought about. He disclaimed all possibility of knowing how his name could have brought terror to the girl, of whom he never had heard before. He was very troubled, exceedingly troubled, to think that he had caused her fright by following her; and he was intensely annoyed to think that he had made himself so disagreeable to me in the Oriel. There was nothing pained him so much as to be disagreeable.

His manner was wholly different from what I had expected it would be after he had sent me a challenge with his eyes at the Oriel. He was so pleasant, so politely humble that I was confident the gentleman had some kind of a plan up his sleeve with which he expected soon to show me what a stupid fellow I was to be crossing purposes with Gaboreau. He was apparently so sure of success that he could afford to be agreeable and simulate an apologetic attitude.

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However, I interrupted him to say in just so many words that he was wasting time, and that he knew quite well that I would be a dunce to believe him, and moreover it did not please me to be thought a dunce.

"Oh, oh," he said cheerfully, not unpleasantly at all, "I have heard of you, Monsieur Everhard. It is said that you are a bold man and I may believe it."

"Not at all," I assured him. "I am anything but bold. I try to say what I mean when I wish to be understood. That is all. I am not skilful with words——"

"Ah, but with cards!" he interrupted laughingly.

"Cards, yes. It is my business, the same as yours seems to be words. Now, Gaboreau, you know something of Franklin De Mey; and I want to know a good deal about him."

"De Mey? Franklin De Mey?" He was pretending that the name was foreign to his ears. "I know nothing of him. Why do you ask?"

"One reason is that another peculiar coincidence has occured. It is strange that you know nothing of De Mey or of Miss Dutton—otherwise Miss Deering. Yet both know of you. And De Mey, evidently being of very uncertain address, had his letters directed to the Tremaine Hotel. The letters were called for, but the hotel knows, or pretends to know nothing of De Mey. Yet this is your headquarters. A peculiar coincidence, is it not?"

"Very!" he answered emphatically and unruffled—actually smiling as though it was one of the strangest and most intriguing coincidences he had heard of.

I looked at him but I did not laugh or smile. Then after a pause, he asked again—

"Why did you speak of—of this Franklin De Mey?"

"It would, I see, be a waste of time to tell you. And if you know nothing of him, you can not possibly be interested. I thank you for your time and," I added slowly, "your courtesy."

His easy, pleasant manner did not for a second leave him. He acted much differently than when we had first parted. His manner made me wonder; it was the manner of a man who has four aces up his sleeve.

"No doubt we shall meet again, Monsieur Everhard," he said smilingly. "It has indeed been a pleasure to—ah, *apologize* to you. Please call upon me any time you feel that I can be of service. And would you be so good as to convey to the young lady my regrets at having inadvertently annoyed her."

I said nothing. I stood for a full half-minute and looked at him and his eyes did not turn aside, nor did the smile leave his face. I knew that he thought he had me baffled. I knew that he thought I was in no sense his match; but I knew further that the greater part of his assurance was in the comfortable knowledge that he was not standing alone, that back of him lurked the carefully organized and watchful gangsters held to heel in the name of Gaboreau.

For the most part I play my hands alone. I work alone. But I also knew that should I call them there would come to help me men as strong and daring as any that he held to heel; and that they would come and stand with me, not because they were afraid of punishment if they failed or lustful rewards if they won. No. They were men with whom I had broken bread in friendship.

Aye, and if a man would have real friends he must go to the wastrels of the earth. Property and comforts and good jobs make men conservative. They dare not take chances for fear of losing a home or a salary, a reputation or a soft chair by their hearth. I would like to have told him what I thought of those men, such as he, who moved in gangs. But I said nothing whatsoever. I merely turned to the door and started out.

"Please call again," he laughed after me. "Call on me any time I can be of any assistance."

I rather fancied that I would.

V

IT WAS arranged that Mr. Guernsey should be introduced to a young man, whose name is of no importance, who would take him to the De Meyervelts. Johnny said that there had been some difficulty in getting a promise of the introduction because the young man had said the De Meyervelts were particular; but it was pointed out that he could pretend that Guernsey was a friend from Los Angeles, and the young man called up over the phone and got permission to bring his "friend."

I assured Guernsey that he must be careful not to win. I did not think it likely that he would win, for I was sure that

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Gaboreau had taken the necessary precautions against any player having too much luck. But I emphasized the statement to Guernsey that he must lose generously: I wanted to see if he was the sort of fellow who could lose graciously. There are very few who can.

I was pleased that he dismissed the matter with a snap of his finger.

"I'll play the limit and bet blind," he assured me.

"And if you do, you will probably win. Don't do it."

"That's a go, but what is it you want me to do there?"

I explained to him that it seemed significant to me that Franklin De Mey should have a name so closely resembling that of the De Meyervelts.

"It would be a strange coincidence," I said, "particularly as he seems to have some connection with Gaboreau, and also as it is pretty well established that the De Meyervelts employ—or rather Gaboreau employs them—to run a gambling palace for the 'four hundred.' You pretend that you are a stranger in the city and that Franklin De Mey's is one of the few names known to you. Inquire about him. You met him in Los Angeles, you know. It would be natural for you to ask about your 'friend,' to try to look him up, and all that.

"And for another thing, note carefully the Gaboreau that you chance to see there. He will probably be in evening clothes, so you won't be able to tell if his street dress has five buttons on the vest, three on the coat, his shoes four eyelets, that there are no ring marks or jewelry on his fingers, and that his tie is a jet black—as I noted on both the Gaboreaus that I met today. But you can tell whether or not his ears have large, slight or no lobes; whether or not at the left of his mouth when he smiles may be seen a canine tooth—only one of the Gaboreaus smiled at me—slightly darker than the others.

"Notice the furrows above his nose—such as appear on the forehead when the eyes are contracted. A gambler's forehead is always furrowed. It comes from scrutinizing closely the cards and roulette numbers. Those on the men's foreheads I met today were not deep. Notice the cuff links. See if they are initialed, as they probably will be, with an ornate 'G.' Notice whatever you can that might be distinctive. I am anxious to discover if either of the men I met today is the one that attends to De Meyervelt's tables. I fancy the same man is always on the job.

"Leave whenever you are ready and telephone my apartment. If you hear no voice answer after the receiver is removed, but simply three sharp blows as though something had hit the mouthpiece, deliver what message you have. Yang is a mute and cannot answer otherwise. But if you speak slowly he will catch every word. I may not be in when you call up."

Mr. Guernsey was rather excited over the prospect of his adventure; but he was eager for it. He said that he would do his best, so I let him think it was of extreme importance, but I did not hope that he would be able to find out much.

It was getting late in the afternoon then, and I had some other things to do; so I left him.

I was interested in 22 Stillwater Place, where one of the Gaboreaus was known to spend what was left of his nights after he had presumably finished with the De Meyervelt parties. I could not very well go prowling around there, asking questions of the deaf servants or peeking into windows; but I took a taxi and drove out to have a look at the house and grounds.

It was a large house, an old two-story house, but well built; and was surrounded by a larger yard than is common in the city. The grounds were not well kept up, and much shrubbery was growing rank, as though the place had come from the hands of flower lovers to those that cared little about them. To the rear stood a garage, and the driveway into it passed under an arbor.

I did not think there was much that I could learn if the police had failed to find out anything to their satisfaction; but it cost nothing but five cents for the use of the telephone to make a trial. After looking over the house and ground as well as I could from the street, I drove to a drug store and went to the telephone booth. I made sure that no telephone was listed under the name of Gaboreau, then called upon "Information" for the number of the telephone at 22 Stillwater Place. "Information" said there was no way that she could give it to me; and continued to be disappointing when I also inquired for the number of Antoine Gaboreau.

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I knew, as anybody would have known, that a man of such activity as Antoine Gaboreau—or any of the Gaboreaus—would not cut himself off from communication even for a few hours each morning. It was not reasonable to suppose it.

There are many telephones in each city that are not listed in the books, and whose numbers will not be given out by the company upon request. I was confident that there was a telephone of this kind in 22 Stillwater Place.

Every complication has a solution. It is not always easy to find, and often one may not find it; but the solution exists just the same. I wanted the telephone number all the more when I found, or suspected, that the telephone was private and was no doubt used only by those close to the chief Gaboreau. There was really the possibility that one might learn something of importance by using the phone. Anyway, I wanted the number.

I have a peculiar faculty for thinking quickly. Sometimes I feel that there is a section of my brain which anticipates my needs and prepares ideas so that when I need them they are ready. I realized that there was only one feasible way for me to get hold of that number without having to stall around and bribe some telephone company employee. So I decided to go for Johnny Blix and make him take me to his friend the inspector.

I stay away from the police department because I try to do very little that is wrong, in which case they have no need of me; and because in the little affairs in which I interest myself from time to time I try to take care of all the details myself, so that I have no need of the police. My friend the police commissioner knows me only socially, and I have always made it a point to ask no favors of any kind of him. I am afraid that I might possibly make him curious.

But I knew that "Information" would treat with consideration an inquiry as to the phone number at 22 Stillwater Place if it came from a police inspector; yet I had no intention of letting the inspector make the request for me, or of letting him know that it was to be made at all. If he had overlooked the detail of finding out Gaboreau's phone number it was no doubt because he regarded it as a matter of no importance.

And Johnny Blix was mistaken if he thought that I never made use of him or his gratitude for the little service I had done him at one time and another. I soon had him into the taxi with me and was on the way to headquarters while I explained that he had to leave me alone in the inspector's office for a minute, because I did not want the inspector to know what place I was trying to locate.

I had never met this inspector before. Ostensibly I was brought to tell him of how I had mentioned to Johnny about seeing two Gaboreaus that afternoon at the Tremaine Hotel. Johnny, knowing of the inspector's interest, thought he would be glad to hear my story.

My tale was a little vague and indefinite. I told of having seen one black-beard go into a room and another—at least I thought it was another—come out. But I remarked that I would not be willing to swear that they were different men.

The inspector was plainly dissatisfied that my story was so vague. I did not blame him. The police are pestered with people who know little or nothing of what they try to make into a tale of importance. Of course, I did not relate to what extent I had spoken with the Gaboreaus, or why. He might not have been so lacking in interest if I had.

While I was talking, Johnny left the room and went into the hallway. Presently, as I had suggested to him, he poked his head into the door and with an air of mysterious importance and urgency asked the inspector to step out for a moment. And as the inspector was leaving, I asked if I might use his telephone. He said certainly, and thought no more of it.

I then called "Information" again and said:

"This is police headquarters. I want the telephone number of Antoine Gaboreau, 22 Stillwater Place. It is important and we are in a hurry."

After some delay, in which no doubt my call was verified as being from headquarters, and perhaps somebody in authority gave permission to disclose the information, she told me the number and rang it for me.

Almost at once an irascible, snappy, high-pitched voice—unmistakably that of an old man—demanded without preliminary to know what I wanted.

"Is this Gaboreau?" I asked.

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"Yes. Who else did you think it was, you fool. What do you want?"

"Franklin De Mey is in trouble," I ventured.

"What's that? What's that? Who are you. De Mey"—he spoke the name with a sneer—"—— fool. Crazy thing anyway. Who are you?"

"He is in serious trouble," I answered.

"What the ——'s he done now? Lunatic!"

"I can't tell more than that," I said.

The fierce voice was suspicious. I perceived that instantly by the suavity it tried to assume in getting me to say who I was.

"I can tell you nothing more than that," I answered.

"Who are you? Who gave you this number?"

"Whom would you imagine gave it to me?" I asked.

"De Mey, as you call him, doesn't know it," he said testily.

Then I knew that there was such a person as De Mey and that De Mey was not his real name. Perhaps that was why it had been so hard for me to locate him.

"Who gave you this number?" he began, and went on without allowing me to answer. And he had a short temper, for at once he was speaking furiously. "Tell me that! By —— you will tell me!"

He forgot all of his assumed suavity and demanded the information in the manner of one who is accustomed to have men tremble when he speaks. I never insult a man except to his face, or I might have made an insolent reply.

The telephone call had given me little information; but at that, more than I had really hoped to learn came from it. I had felt sure that any one answering would think that I was a friend, and so perhaps speak a bit indiscreetly to me. But I was confident that I was talking to the *real* Gaboreau at last. The black-bearded fellows might be suave and catlike; but this man was avowedly tigerish. And I was sure that he was the real power behind the name of Gaboreau.

I knew it would be useless to try to get anything more from him, and I wanted to finish before the inspector returned. So I hung up, then called central again and gave instructions—in the potent name of police headquarters—that no information should be given out to Gaboreau as to where the telephone connection with him had been made from.

WHEN the inspector returned he was plainly disgusted. I did not know what yarn Johnny had concocted to entertain him out in the hallway; but it had obviously not been satisfactory. The inspector was curt with me, too. He thanked me rather sardonically for having offered my information about the Gaboreaus at the Tremaine, but added that I did not seem to know much about police work if I thought anything so vague as I had brought him would be of value. I admitted that I knew very little about the police or their work, and I fancy that I did it with a trace of humbleness. At least I tried to appear humble.

Johnny was much perturbed. As we left the police station he explained that he had not had the trace of an idea as to what he would talk to the inspector about when he called him into the hallway; and for want of anything else as a subject he had begun to protest that his place was not paying him anything like proportionate with the rake-off that found its way into the inspector's pocket for the privilege of going unraided. Naturally that had peeved the inspector, both because it was an inopportune time and place to mention such things and because it was a protest with which he could not possibly find favor at any time or place.

Johnny felt badly that he had put himself out of grace with the inspector, who had really been a good friend, though well imbursed for his friendships. Some inspectors, Johnny informed me, even when well imbursed, did not make good friends.

I expressed the hope that something might turn up which would reinstate Johnny in the favor of the inspector; but Johnny was pessimistic.

"This Gaboreau's a hoodoo, Mr. Everhard. He's got me in Dutch with the inspector. He'll get you in bad, too. I don't like to interfere, and I ain't interfering. But I wish you'd call it off. Take a trip or something. You haven't a chance in the world. The cards are marked and every member of the gang has a hold-out up his sleeve. Better cash in and quit, Mr. Everhard. You ain't lost nothing yet. The secret of poker and life is to know when to quit."

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"That's right," I said. "But this isn't the time to quit, Johnny. Nobody ever wins a pot if he doesn't stay for the showdown."

When I got back to the apartment Vivian was already rigged out in the red wig and in Jessie's clothes; and she posed before Jessie and me for our comment on her appearance. But she objected in playful tones, but none the less sincerely, against wearing the long, flaming, red gloves.

"I'll be arrested sure! It will be committing an atrocity."

I told her that she might carry them; and at once she poked them out of sight in her bag. She did it to tease, for she knew very well what I meant when I said she might carry them.

"No fair. You must have them in sight."

And she gingerly removed the gloves.

Jessie was extremely curious to know what it was all about and what did I expect would happen, and what would I do if "something" did happen. Vivian asked no questions. I believe she would have packed up and have gone blindfolded around the world if I had asked her to; and never a question would have been asked.

I was confident that none but De Mey himself would be able to tell that Vivian was not Jessie, and since he seemed to have an aversion to showing himself, I did not expect De Mey to put in an appearance. If he had not been able to appear on the street the night the girl who loved him had arrived in the city, I did not know of any reason to expect him on the street this evening.

I left the apartment first, walked a few blocks, took a taxi and drove back, then waited until Vivian came out and got into the taxi that had been called and kept waiting at the apartment-house entrance for her. I took that little precaution in the hope that it might not be discovered that I was accompanying her. I hardly expected that I would be able to deceive any one who might have been detailed to watch, but I thought it as well to try.

For the same reason, when we came within sight of the Oriel Café, Vivian got out of her taxi and walked along the street alone, and I had the driver of mine move slowly, so that I could keep her in sight. I felt that she could very capably engage whoever she was to meet in conversation and probably find out something of interest to me, for I had told her everything connected with the affair, except that Mr. Guernsey was in the city.

When the Oriel came in sight, Vivian stopped and got out.

I told the driver to keep about a hundred feet behind her, and to stop when she stopped to talk to any one.

I was surprised to see there was considerable traffic on the street. There were several automobiles by the curbing, and some that passed up and down the street. Three machines were in front of the Oriel. It was as though the quiet little café had suddenly become fashionable.

I peered through the glass of the taxi and watched Vivian as well as I could. I saw her walk along swinging the red gloves conspicuously. I saw a man step from the curbing, lift his hat and speak to her.

She stopped and stepped to the edge of the curbing.

Then many things happened at once. I saw her suddenly jerked into the open door of a taxi that stood by the curbing. Its motor was running and it got under way at once. I shouted to my driver, but he had stopped and seemed to be taking an hour to get started again.

I started to jump out and run forward, but the instant I saw the other taxi was getting away, I knew that I could not catch it on foot and I shouted again to my driver to follow and overtake the taxi that was darting off. We started, and the next moment a heavy car rammed us. The collision was severe enough to put my taxi out of the running.

I jumped out and looked hurriedly around for another machine to chase the one that I caught a last glimpse of as it turned the corner.

I am not excitable, but I came very near being excited at that moment. To have Vivian seized and carried off under my eyes was something that I had not thought possible. I had not believed that any gang would be daring enough to do such a thing at that hour on that street. It was not only that it took a daring gang, but it took a large and capably organized gang.

Johnny Blix's repeated warning flashed across my mind; he had said I would need a royal flush up my sleeve to beat Gaboreau. Just then I wanted a fast machine. But a fast machine would have done no good, for the taxi had easily had

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time to turn three or four corners and be lost from pursuit. As much as anything, I was surprised that none of the pedestrians passing by had not seen the struggling woman being dragged into the taxi and had not protested. All the people in sight could not possibly have been arranged for by Gaboreau. But the whole affair had been carried off in a flash.

Now any one could have taken my money, could have taken what is more precious than that, my health, and I would have tried to find some sort of philosophical consolation. Money and life are all a part of the hazardous gzme. But Vivian—whoever touched her was sure to have whatever vengeance I could invoke launched at his head. That she had been seized for another woman meant something, but not much to me. It meant that the attack had not been directed against her. But that offered no consolation. She was gone, and had it been in my power, I would have blown that end of the city into the bay to have had her returned.

But for the moment I was very nearly helpless. My taxi had been rammed intentionally and hard. It was very cleverly done. I called out to first one and then to another machine, but no driver would take me.

At once a crowd gathered about the injured machine. Gaboreau did not need to have arranged for the crowd. It always comes wherever there is the least commotion. It springs up in deserted streets, pours itself out of doorways and down stairs, up from cellars and from around the corners. It was the same stupid, gaping, wide-eyed crowd that gathers everywhere there is an accident—the vulture-eyed that swarm more rapidly to a smashed auto or an injured body than the hideous birds to carrion. Gaboreau may have counted on it, but he did not need to plan it. The crowd can always be depended on to rush forward and stare.

I STARTED to push my way through the enclosing circle when a hand fell on my shoulder and a voice that I recognized spoke. It was a smooth, soft, velvet voice touched with a foreign accent.

I turned and faced the Gaboreau I had first met in the Oriel. He wore a motorist's coat and goggles, but I recognized him. He began graciously expressing regrets that our meeting had been in the nature of an accident.

Accident indeed! I listened, for there was nothing else to do, but my blood was hot with anger. I did not show it. I did not intend to let him know just how I felt. I had no intention of either warning him that he was on dangerous ground or of letting him gloat at my discomfiture.

He blamed my chauffeur for awkwardness, explaining that he was driving his own car himself and that he had tried to turn aside, but that the clumsy fellow at the wheel of my machine would not get out of the way.

But strangely enough, his car had not suffered. A great big heavy underslung thing of foreign make, it had driven its steel-capped radiator squarely against the front wheel of the taxi and wrenched the steering-gear so that it was helpless. No doubt the hood of his car had been designed originally for just such opportune collisions.

Gaboreau conducted himself with admirable finesse, though he must have known that I did not believe a word that he said. He spluttered amiably about the carelessness of my driver, and apologized for not having been able to avoid the collision. He talked and talked. Perhaps he was trying to hold me until all chances of my being able to pursue the taxi that had carried off Vivian were lost.

Of course, he said, such a meeting had been furthermost from his thoughts when we last parted some few hours before. That was how he dug at me; sarcastically cunningly, artistically.

But it was an ill time for such stage play. I said nothing to show that I did not believe it was an accident. I pretended to be entirely credulous and unsuspecting. I did not intend that he should get off so easily as he wished. I had an idea, too, that he was so taken with his own cleverness that he would tumble into a little design of my own.

It suited my purpose to appear vexed but agreeable. I seemed to have forgotten the unpleasantness of our previous meetings. I explained that I was in very much of a hurry; that an important engagement would be broken if I could not make quick time.

Then he sardonically proposed to take me himself, since he had unfortunately been

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the cause of my delay. He no doubt thought that would be the climax to his joke.

Perhaps he was a bit surprised when I accepted his offer. But he did not try to withdraw.

"It is very kind of you," I said, looking at my watch. "But I am in something of haste. I simply can not afford to be late."

"No trouble at all," he laughed. "It is a pleasure, monsieur. A real pleasure. I told you to call on me whenever I could be of service."

The inevitable policeman had arrived to take the numbers of the cars and our names. The injured taxi limped to the curbing to await a mechanic. The crowd thinned somewhat.

Gaboreau and I got into his big car. I was glad to see that he accepted no other passengers, for I caught the gesture with which he waved aside a man that came up as though expecting to be invited to get in, and who would, no doubt, have been introduced to me as a friend. But Gaboreau evidently thought himself a match, and more than a match for me. No doubt he had looked up my reputation and made inquiries; but the chances are that he had not believed all that he had heard.

Gaboreau started up the machine and asked me where I wanted to go. For a moment I pretended to be getting my bearings, and the delay permitted us to get a half block or more away from the Oriel. Then for an answer I swiftly withdrew a thirty-eight automatic from my pocket and pressed the muzzle against his side.

"Keep both hands on the wheel," I directed, "and drive just as I say."

"But, monsieur——"

"I shall do the talking. All of it. Don't speak unless you are asked to."

"But, my friend——"

"Another interruption like that and I am afraid something will happen to you. I am not in a very good humor just at present. And if you fail in the least to do as I say, if you make the slightest signal to any one, well—you will probably regret it. That is, if one has regrets after being consigned to the morgue."

He believed me, too. It was just as well that he did.

I was very insistent that he should not take either hand off the wheel. I could watch them there and I knew that as long as he kept them on the wheel that he was helpless, though I added a warning that if he had motor trouble of any kind or another accident that caused him to stop, I would consider it as an interruption and take the necessary precautions.

"And," I added, "you had better do a little silent praying that nothing goes wrong with your engine."

He understood perfectly.

I knew better than to demand that he follow the machine that had carried off Vivian, though I did not doubt that he knew exactly where it had gone; but I was sure that if I permitted him to drive anywhere he chose, on the pretense of following that taxi, that he would run me into some kind of a trap. As long as I could keep him away from his friends I had him at a disadvantage.

No doubt he thought that I did not know what to do with him, for I made him drive first down one street, then down another, and around and around corners. But I wished to make sure that we were not being followed, and if we were followed, I wished to shake off the shadowers. I did not think that we were being watched for it seemed likely that this Gaboreau was important enough to be considered able to take care of himself. Perhaps he would have been had I not got the drop as soon as I did. I meant to keep it, too; and I knew very well what I was up to. He would find out soon enough.

Allowing him to drive only as I directed, we went up and down the city until I saw no one was keeping us in sight, then we steered for the residence district.

Then I told him that he might talk as much as he pleased. And he seemed pleased to talk volubly, though I must say that he took the situation gracefully. He was almost witty at times, and protested amiably that this was no way to treat a friend. He evidently thought I was wholly at a loss to know what to do with him, and must have been quite sure that soon I would turn him loose and leave him free to exact what revenge he thought befitting my impudence.

My sense of humor was not sufficiently developed to appreciate witticisms while Vivian was in possible dangers; so I did not respond. I told him that he might talk, for I knew we were away from the

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place where he might be able to shout to friends, and I had hoped that he would be so angry that he would let slip something informative. But he was not apparently the least angry. My silence even failed to check his fluency. It was remarkable. I had never before been up against a man who could be so gracefully facetious while his life hung literally on a hair-trigger.

I can see how that easy, light, half cynical, and carefully Frenchified speech of his might have been disconcerting to any one whose nerves were loose. It made me wonder what he might have tucked up his sleeve. But I was not troubled over him. It takes more than a facile tongue to make me nervous when my finger rests on the trigger, and I knew perfectly well what was going to happen to him.

When we came to a spot quiet enough to suit my purpose I made him stop the machine.

"Stand up," I said.

He stood up.

"Put your arms above your head and keep them there."

He lifted his arms and I pressed the muzzle snugly against his stomach.

"Well prepared, aren't you?" I remarked as I took a gun from his hip pocket—where crude workmen always carry such things.

He was better prepared than I had fancied, though. I searched him, and did it thoroughly. I began with his hat-band and ended by making him remove his shoes. From his vest pocket I took a small, viciously effective revolver, one of the miniature kind that may be held in the palm of the hand. But he had not had a chance to get at it. From his belt I removed a dagger.

Perhaps he had a trace of the Southern Italian in him for all of his Frenchiness—he was dark enough to have had such ancestry, and if he had it, no doubt felt unarmed without a stiletto. Out of his coat pocket I took a small, oblong tube, built something like a compressed air gun. I had a suspicion as to what it was, and leveled it at his face.

"For God's sake don't!" he cried, forgetting to put the Frenchiness into his voice.

"What is it?" I asked.

He did not answer.

"Have to try it, then," I remarked, again pointing it at him.

He drew back until I thought he would tumble from the machine; then he gasped—

"Vitriol!"

I came near casting the thing aside as one would upon finding that he had a viper by the tail. But the vitriol gun had certain advantages. It was noiseless and effective. One could use it without attracting attention for blocks around. Instead of dropping it I held it leveled at his face.

"Don't move," I said quietly, soothingly. "There is no danger—at present. Perhaps none at all unless you become disagreeable. But I am glad to have this. It is noiseless. However, please remember that though I hold this in my right hand I am not putting all my trust in it. You might seize my hand and dodge the spray of vitriol, but my left hand is not far from a high-power automatic—with a hair-trigger. And I always carry guns cocked. Some people may think it dangerous—and it is for some people.

"This afternoon you were good enough to say that you had heard of me, and that I had the reputation for being something of a bold man. Perhaps that reputation isn't deserved, for I never take chances, as you can see. I prefer to take the drop.

"This afternoon you also expressed the hope of the pleasure of meeting me again. You are a most fortunate man to have your wishes so quickly fulfilled. And since you have heard of me, you know that I do two things besides playing cards. I keep my word and I shoot straight. And now I want to tell you something before I ask a question.

"You can probably bluff me out and pretend that you do not know, for you are a good actor, and I have at present no way of proving that you might dally with the truth. But if I ever find out that you have lied to me you will very much regret it. I never make more direct threats than that, Monsieur Gaboreau. Now for the question: where is that girl?"

I threw the question at him and pressed the vitriol gun close into his face.

He shrank back, gasping:

"Oh, my God, don't! I don't know. Honestly. I don't know."

"Be careful."

"I don't know. Before God, I don't."

"It might be just as well to leave God's name out of this. Think again."

"I don't know. Take it away"—the

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vitriol gun was closer to his face, a handsome face of its kind, and he was anxious not to have it marred.

"Be careful," I cautioned him. "There is a bare chance that the old tiger of Stillwater Place may not be able to help you as much as you expect.

His eyes showed amazement.

"Oh, yes," I bluffed, "there are many things known about Gaboreau—or you Gaboreaus. For instance, there were two of you talking with me this afternoon at the Tremaine. But as I remarked, you may find it unpleasant if I discover that you are lying. I ask you where that girl was taken, and why?"

"I don't know. I haven't lied. We knew you were in that taxi—I was to stall it. That is all I know."

That was no place to hold a third-degree inquiry, so I continued the search. Out of his inside coat pockets I took papers and letters, and as these left his possession he seemed for the first time to realize that he was in a tight situation. His gay and facetious manner had left him and did not return. He looked gloomy, depressed.

When I was sure that everything transferable had been removed to my pockets, I told him to drive on and gave him directions that were not aimlessly made.

I was in more of a hurry than my leisurely search might indicate, but I have found that even in haste it is well to go slow and cover the ground well. Moreover, I am very chary about taking chances. There is a great difference between doing something along the lines of a carefully planned design and in rushing in blindly, expecting to plug through blindly, or to shoot one's way out. I usually know what I am about. I knew very well this time.

When I came to a spot that suited me, I made him leave the car standing at the curb and walk by my side. I made him walk and walk block after block until we came to my apartment. I had left the car at a distance because I did not want any of his friends to locate it near my place of residence and get suspicious that I might have something to do with the disappearance of this particular Gaboreau. No doubt I would quickly enough be suspected, for we had been seen driving off together, but that would not be nearly such incriminating evidence as if his car were discovered standing around the corner from my doorstep.

He was a very poor hostage to hold in exchange for Vivian, but he was better than nothing. So I told him when he stepped out of the car that we would walk for some distance. I also told him that he could, if he were desperate enough, call to any of the pedestrians we passed, or beg protection of a policeman if we chanced to meet one, but that I would not advise him to do any such thing.

I intimated that it might lead to sudden unpleasantness. He understood perfectly. He understood so perfectly that he kept his hands in the side pockets of his coat, as I suggested, pulled his hat over his eyes, and walked beside me all of the way without looking to the left or to the right. Perhaps it was just as well that he had heard something about me before; and no doubt he was beginning to believe much that he had heard.

I TOOK him into my room. Yang Li arose from the floor as we came in.

"Watch him," I said to the yellow-visaged, keen-eyed old fellow.

Yang made a quick movement and shot out his left hand as some men do to shoot their cuffs forward—a long, glittering blade was in his hand.

Gaboreau stared hard at the knife. No one spoke. No one moved. The Chinaman stood poised easily against the wall, his sharp, beady eyes on Gaboreau's face. Gaboreau looked nowhere but at the knife. He seemed fascinated. After a long time he glanced at Yang's face, then his eyes were drawn again to the fine shimmering ray of steel.

I spoke slow and distinctly and said:

"Once again I ask you to tell me where that girl is and why was she taken? Who did it?"

His nerves were badly wrenched. He trembled a little and his voice was not firm. But he was no coward. He said that he did not know, and I knew very well that he was lying.

"Denials are no good to me," I answered. "And you must see by this time that I don't care to hear them. If you can't tell me where the girl has been taken—well, you will be of no further use to me."

With that, I made a significant gesture toward the lean Chinaman, who stood with the blade slightly advanced, as though ready to lunge.

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Nerves. It was a severe test for any man's. He must have known that Yang's arm would have shot out at the slightest word from me. One little thrust of that long, keen blade and Gaboreau would never more dream of vengeance on me! He understood that, too. And he must have understood that it was little I cared whether or not the arm did shoot out. But he protested ignorance; and he lied.

I knew he was lying, and I told him so. I told him quietly, unoffensively, for I do not abuse helpless men. I knew that he knew something of where the girl had been taken and why. He was a man of too much importance not to have known something of the game in which he had played a leading part that night in the Oriel and this night in the street by the Oriel. But not one word of information could I get. And I did not wonder that Gaboreau, the real Gaboreau, was a man of sinister power if he had such loyal fellows as this to work for him.

I thought of calling Gaboreau's attention to the fact that the girl he had tried to carry away was safely in my apartment. I could show her to him. But I did not do it. I felt that while he might be very much surprised, he would still have the same reasons for secrecy, if not in fact greater reasons. He might get it into his head that I was likely to be a match for even the Gaboreau gang, thus, apparently, to regain the girl with so little loss of time, when he had made I did not know what preparations to hold her; and that he would be less inclined to talk than ever.

He was silent now largely because he expected me to be swiftly dealt with by his friends. Convince him that I might possibly be a little more clever than his friends, since they, or at least some of them, had failed to hold the girl, and it would be much harder to make him talk. I intended, if other measures failed me, to hold another conversation with him, a more serious one, and I meant to make him talk.

I saw it would be a waste of time to question him further. But I made it plain that I had not believed a word he said, and that he would probably regret having tried to deceive me.

If he thought I was going to let him go with nothing but a threat, he was badly fooled. I had no intention of letting him go. I did not intend to let him go at all if I could help it, for there were already enough black-bearded Gaboreaus loose in the world to keep me busy for some hours. So I set about gagging and trussing him. And when he was tied so that he could not move, yet not severely bound, I laid him down by the wall and put a pillow under his head.

Then I spoke to Yang, and the Chinaman sank to the floor in the center of the room and fixed his eyes on the face of the bound man.

I had no further need to worry about the activity of this particular Gaboreau.

Jessie was in the next room.

When I went in I found her nervous from waiting and imagining things, and she bounced at me with a storm of hysterical questions.

I told her something of what had happened and she was badly frightened and worried. She was good enough to say, and I liked her for it for she really seemed to mean it, that she wished she had gone instead of Vivian.

I wished it too, but I did not say so.

"If we could only find Franklin!" she wailed. "He would save her. But that terrible Gaboreau. Franklin said that no man could fight him."

"No?" I asked.

It was a theatrical thing to do, but she with her talk of Franklin and Gaboreau was exasperating. So I took her gently by the arm and I led her to the door. I threw it open, then pointed across the room where Gaboreau the mighty and dangerous —as she pictured him—lay bound and gagged like a fowl ready for the spit.

She almost shrieked her amazement, and one question stumbled over another—they left her tongue so fast.

"There is nothing to explain," I said. "This is merely a worthless hostage that fell into my hands after Vivian disappeared. As you see by his eyes, he is almost as amazed as yourself. Yes. He is wondering how on earth you got back here so quickly. He thinks that his good friends must have gone to sleep and let you slip through their fingers. Well, let him figure it out for himself."

Then I closed the door.

I went on to explain to her, however, that Gaboreau being there did not mean that she was by any means safe on the street.

"But you are safe here. Stay here. If

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you hear any suspicious noises, throw open the door and call Yang. You may not like him, and you may be afraid of him. But I know Yang well enough to be sure that he wouldn't let some one else meet a woman with whom he had an appointment because he was afraid to come out of his cellar."

For an instant she was shocked into silence, then she exclaimed in an angry, tearful voice:

"That's horrid of you! Compare Franklin to that Chinaman!"

"No. I am comparing Franklin to a cowardly Chinaman. Not to Yang Li."

With that I left her.

VI

I LOOKED at my watch as I closed the door and shut out the indignant sobbing of the girl. I was sorry to have made her angry, but she with her talk of Franklin De Mey made me quite irritable.

It was after ten o'clock. I wished that I might have heard from Guernsey, but Yang said there had been no telephone call. I wanted to get some trace of Franklin De Mey—or whoever he was—above all things just at that moment; and Guernsey's visit to the De Meyervelt home was the only expectation that I had of doing so.

After I had gone down to the street, I even returned and questioned Gaboreau again, asking about De Mey. But as I expected he said nothing except that he did not know such a person or to whom I referred. I had no time to lose. I was sure, though, that once I got my hands on De Mey there would be no trouble in locating Vivian.

Since it suited Gaboreau to pretend ignorance, I thought I might as well search for other sources of information. Besides, I needed hostages.

I found a taxi and drove to the Tremaine Hotel.

I told my driver to wait for me, as I expected to bring back a sick friend.

I looked carefully through the lobby but saw nothing of the other Gaboreau. I went up to the clerk and asked:

"Have you seen Mr. Gaboreau around?"

"No sir. I think he is in his room. Just a minute and I'll find out for you."

"Never mind. Never mind," I said. "I expected to find him in the lobby as he isn't feeling well and I am to take him away. I'll go up to his room. Perhaps he is lying down."

"Shall I call the doctor?"

"It won't be necessary—I hope. I'll go up and see."

I bought an evening paper off the newsstand and went up to the room. A penny newspaper is a very effective instrument at times. I expected to make good use of it—at least get my money's worth.

I approached the door cautiously and listened. I heard footsteps crossing to and fro and a man whistling softly. He did not sound like a sick man. I would have to play the rôle of a poor physician. That would be easy enough since I had found out that he was alone.

I retreated several paces then came forward boldly so that my footsteps might be heard, and thumped loudly on the door.

Gaboreau, the other one, of course, opened it.

He looked at me coldly, appraisingly, no doubt wondering what on earth I was doing there again.

"Here," I said angrily, waving my penny newspaper in his face, "you are the cause of this! Look at it. Look here. Read this."

He was entitled to the opinion that I was crazy, but naturally he took the paper and held it in both hands, just as I expected he would, and began trying to see what was in the article I pointed out that could possibly have aroused my anger against him.

Both of his hands were out of his pockets and he was wholly off guard, so I was really taking no chances at all when I pushed an automatic into his face and told him to be quiet.

It may be that he had never heard of me; or it may be that he had a misconception of courage. He dropped the paper and made a grab for my gun, at the same time clawing at his coat pocket with the other hand. Likely enough he thought he had a lunatic to deal with.

I let him grab the gun which I held in my left hand. Then with the one in my right I hit him on the head, and he sank quietly to the floor.

I dragged him into the room and closed the door. No one had seen. It was a quiet hotel, and except for the anger in my voice, there had been no noise; and that was not much, for I am not a noisy person even when simulating anger. Anger may seem

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a queer ruse to throw a man off guard, but there are times when it is effective.

I hurriedly searched the rooms, but found nothing that seemed important. I hardly expected to find anything, for this being known as something of a headquarters for Gaboreau, it was not likely that anything of importance would be kept there, since it might fall into the hands of the police in case they found evidence elsewhere that made them willing to force a search.

From the unconscious man I removed a vitriol gun and a dagger, as well as some personal papers which I did not have opportunity to look at carefully.

I was anxious to get out. When I came to the Tremaine I had expected to bring this particular Gaboreau out with me. If I had found him in the lobby I would have tried to get him to take me to his room—where he would have been taken with sudden illness. I did not know how long he would remain unconscious, for though the blow had been anything but gentle he might begin to recover almost any minute.

But I felt reasonably safe in asking the clerk to send up a bell-boy at once to help me get Mr. Gaboreau to his car. Also I mentioned that Mr. Gaboreau was to be rushed away to where he could be given proper attention, and I again refused to consider the house doctor. Most assuredly I did not want him.

I put Gaboreau's hat on and had him sitting upright in a chair when the boy arrived. I wanted that hat to stay on, too. And I held him upright in the chair and talked to him as though he were sick, not unconscious.

"He may faint before we get him down," I said to the boy, extending a dollar, "but we can't wait for a stretcher."

Between us we practically carried him, but I doubt if the boy realized it. I drew Gaboreau's arm around my shoulder and so bore him that, while we walked slowly, it looked as though we were assisting a very drunk or sick man; and most of the weight was on me. I saw signs that he was beginning to come to, and as we started through the lobby I was much afraid that he would recover consciousness enough to make a protest before I had him safely inside the taxi.

Of course, a number of people gathered about to look and to comment and suggest and try to help. The clerk came from behind the counter and was very solicitous, but he remembered that I had mentioned before I went up that Mr. Gaboreau was not well.

I had much difficulty in keeping Gaboreau's hat on without seeming overly anxious to have it stay on. But I was anxious. Very much so. I didn't want any one to notice the large bump that I had raised. It might induce questions, suspicions, investigations and delay. There were enough questions anyway. Gaboreau was well known, as any man would be who lived in a hotel and had such a mysterious reputation as his own. I wondered if many or any people knew that there were two Gaboreaus, maybe more, living under the name of one. I wondered then and I have wondered since how the two of them managed so effectively to have a common identity. A wonderful organization, that Gaboreau gang.

At last Gaboreau was safely stowed inside the taxi, and for the benefit of those who had followed us out under the marquee I gave the chauffeur instructions to drive to the Hallowell Hospital.

But after we had gone a few blocks, I told the driver that my friend was feeling so much better that I thought I could take him home; and I gave another and entirely fictitious address.

Gaboreau was feeling better, too. He opened his eyes and looked hard at me, but he made no move. I knew he was trying to think, and was wondering what had happened to him and how he came to be there. Perhaps he expected to wake up in a minute and find himself comfortably in his own bed with nothing but the memory of a nightmare to trouble him.

I merely put the vitriol gun in front of his face and remarked—

"You are not feeling very well, so it would be best if you made no sound or move."

He understood. But I could see that he was much mystified as to what it was all about. Evidently he had a severe headache for his hand started up to his head, then he withdrew it quickly and looked at me apprehensively. I had said not to make a move.

"You may rub your head. I might have been more gentle, but you were inclined to be obstreperous. No, you don't need to talk—now."

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After that his hand went repeatedly to the side of his head and he rubbed tenderly, speculatively, the large bump that stood out like a turkey egg.

IN TIME the driver drew up at the address that I had given him. I do not know whose house it was and I did not care. The driver could show it to as many people as came inquiring for the place to which he had driven us for all that it mattered to me. I expected that somebody would be looking him up and making inquiries before morning, and it may be that the good people of the house were mystified and annoyed by strangers who came asking curious questions. I never took the trouble to find out.

I told the driver when he drew up at the curbing that my friend was feeling so much better that we would be able to make out all right without assistance, so he cheerfully drove off with a modest tip.

Then I explained to Gaboreau that we would have to walk for some blocks, as my apartment lay a half-mile away; and that while I would gladly have saved him the trouble if it had been convenient, still I did not think it was worth taking the chance of having that driver remember my apartment the next day in case there was inquiry as to who had taken Monsieur Gaboreau from his room at the Tremaine.

Gaboreau seemed to agree with me. That is, he made no objections. But in an injured tone he inquired as to what it was all about and what the devil I was up to.

I told him that the street was a poor place to talk over private matters, and holding the vitriol gun at the edge of my pocket so its moral force might not be lost on him, I conducted him to my apartment, past the sleepy boy on watch at the telephone switch, avoided the elevator and led him into the room where Yang Li solemnly kept watch over the bound body lying against the wall.

It was no doubt rather disquieting and astonishing for both Gaboreaus when they looked into each other's eyes, and each saw that the other was a prisoner. A fine to-do indeed when the king-pins of the Gaboreau gang should be herded into a room in a down-town apartment and not be allowed to move a muscle or speak a word without permission. They stared and stared at each other, and the unvoiced question was: how on earth were you caught?

"Now Mr. Gaboreau," I said to the second one to be brought in, "if you will give me a little of your attention I may say something of interest."

He turned toward me, but glanced again and again at his double on the floor.

"Give me your whole attention, please. I like to look into the eyes of the party to whom I am speaking."

His eyes met mine.

"Something has happened this evening," I went on, "which has called for this unusual procedure. You must not fail to understand that since I have taken the trouble to bring you here I am not willing to be put off with denials or pretension of ignorance. You must further realize that my man here—" Iindicated the inscrutable Yang who stood with the sinister blade drooping in his hand—"has no scruples against drawing a drop or two of blood if the occasion seems to call for blood.

"Furthermore, you might as well understand that I know that you and your gagged double there are merely pawns in this little affair which has engaged my attention. No doubt both of you have felt from time to time that you were captains, or at least lieutenants. But you have been nothing more than orderlies carrying out orders—" here I was making something of a guess, but there was little risk in such a guess after my experience over the telephone that afternoon—"orders from the old man at 22 Stillwater Place."

I could see that he, too, was surprised at the familiarity with which I mentioned the old man of Stillwater Place. No doubt his identity was guarded with much secrecy.

"This evening a girl was seized and carried away from in front of the Oriel Café. Where has she been taken?"

"I do not know," Gaboreau answered promptly and calmly.

"Think it over, think it over."

"I do not know," he repeated.

"Yang," I said significantly.

The Chinaman stepped forward noiselessly and swiftly as a shadow and gave the knife a twirl with his wrist.

"It would perhaps be better, Mr. Gaboreau," I said, "if you were less speedy with your answers. I am not interested in what you don't know. Cudgel your memory a bit. And do not feel secure

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because you see your double, or brother, or whoever he is, lying comfortably there by the wall with a pillow under his head. Once more, Mr. Gaboreau, where was it arranged to have the girl taken this evening?"

He paused for a few seconds. Yang's knife was enough to make any one pause. Then he said—

"I do not know."

"No?"

"No."

"But you knew she was to be taken some place?"

"Yes."

"Ah, I see. We are getting on. And how did you learn that?"

"Felix told me."

"And just what did Felix tell you?"

He hesitated and glanced over his shoulder. I touched his arm significantly, but perhaps not until the eyes of the bound man on the floor had flashed a message asking him to deny all knowledge of the plan to carry off the girl.

Gaboreau faced me again, and said:

"Felix just mentioned that a girl was to be taken off this evening. I suppose that he referred to the same one you have in mind."

"You suppose it? Don't you know?"

"No—that is——"

"Don't fumble for words, Mr. Gaboreau. Speak promptly and distinctly, and if you again look at Felix there, I shall ask Yang to bring his knife closer to you. It is a sharp knife, Mr. Gaboreau, a very sharp knife."

"I can see that it is," he said.

"Make sure that you do not feel that it is. Now you started to say that Felix had been instructed or detailed to superintend the job, didn't you?"

Gaboreau appeared for a moment as though he intended to refuse to answer; but he changed his mind and thought it better to lie.

"No. Felix attends to his business and I know nothing of it."

"But you said that he mentioned a little job."

"Yes. He mentioned it. That's all."

I have hurt one or two men in my time, but I have never tortured one. That is something I can not bring myself to do. All of the men that I have hurt have either started the trouble or been dangerous. None of them have been unarmed. I might have been able to extort something from Gaboreau by putting him in pain, and again I might not. There are some men who will not yield. So I thought it better not to carry too far the pretense that Yang would use his knife, but merely allow Gaboreau to think that Yang *might* use it. I said:

"Very well, Yang. You need not wait for me to tell you—" I knew that Yang would wait for my signal, though—"but the next time Mr. Gaboreau lies or tries to evade a simple question, just prod his memory. Time is precious this evening, Mr. Gaboreau. I have none to waste. It may possibly be that you do not know where the girl has been taken. But you do know something of Franklin De Mey. Who is he?"

"I do not know any one by that name," he said quickly, too quickly.

"Did you ever hear of him?"

"Yes."

"Go on, go on. Don't stop when you are started on the right track. When and where did you hear of him?"

"You mentioned him this afternoon to Felix. I listened through the keyhole. I know nothing more than that."

"You mean that I mentioned him when you and I first met in the lobby before you took me up-stairs and turned me over to Felix. Isn't that what you meant?"

"Yes. But I never heard of him before."

"You don't intend to tell me about De Mey?"

"I know nothing to tell," he answered hurriedly as Yang gave the knife a flourish.

"I can't argue with you on that point. But there is another little point on which it will be more dangerous for you to pretend ignorance. I will see just how truthful you are. I know that one of you blackbeards arrives every morning at Stillwater Place between three and six. Where does he come from?"

"I know nothing about it."

"At last you have put your foot into it. Did you ever hear of De Meyervelt? A name strangely resembling De Mey, is it not? Did you ever hear of that family?"

"Yes."

"Do you know that a man named Gaboreau runs a gambling layout in their house?"

He was reluctant to answer, but evidently saw that he was on dangerous ground,

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for I seemed to know much more about the De Meyervelts than about the De Meys.

"Yes," he admitted.

"Which one of you runs it?"

"Robert."

"So it is Robert," I said, as though Robert was well known to me. "And he goes to Stillwater Place?"

"Yes, sometimes. He is the manager for the De Meyervelt amusement room."

"Amusement room. Euphonious title for a crooked layout, isn't it. And when Robert doesn't go to Stillwater Place, who does?"

"Sometimes I, sometimes Felix and sometimes George——"

He caught himself too late. He had not intended to mention George.

"Ah yes, George. Now tell me about George. Yang, I expect Mr. Gaboreau will need to have a little prod on his memory before he is through talking about George."

I have always suspected that Chinaman had a sense of humor; and I came near not being able to suppress a smile when he bent forward menacingly, knife poised, peering hard into the face of Gaboreau as though ready to run him through at the first signs of reluctance to answer.

"Does George come to the Tremaine often?" I asked.

"No."

"Where may he be found?"

"He has no regular place."

"If you wanted to get in touch with him how would you go about it?" I asked.

Gaboreau hesitated, but his eyes settled on the point of Yang's knife and he said:

"He keeps in touch by telephone."

"With that at Stillwater Place?"

"No," Gaboreau said promptly, with every appearance of honesty, "there is no telephone there."

"No?"

"No."

Then I took a chance. I don't often take them, but it seemed a safe one because I had an idea that if George kept in touch with a telephone it was with none other than that at Stillwater Place.

I went to the telephone and called for the number of Stillwater Place—the number I had got through police headquarters.

Then I told Gaboreau to come and take the receiver.

"How on earth—" he began, unable to conceal surprise at my knowing it.

"Never mind that," I said speaking rapidly. "You find out where George can be located. And Yang will be beside you so that your first suspicious word into that mouthpiece will probably be your last."

I convinced him that I meant it, too. I did mean it.

"Charles speaking," he said. "Where am I? Tremaine of course. Yes, I went out. Felix? Oh, Felix—I don't know—" a long pause—"If George could relieve me. In an hour at the Crystal. All right—" another long pause—"I went out of the Tremaine to see—that is—I had to attend to that little matter you spoke of this afternoon. Yes sir. Yes sir, I will attend to that—" still another long pause.

I gently took the receiver from his hand and put it to my ear. The harsh, tigerish voice was snapping:

"Somebody keep that —— Everhard in sight. He may try to make trouble, and troublesome men—we must quiet them, you know—" he laughed in a fierce, cackling, satisfied way.—"You'll attend to that will you?"

I clapped my hand over the mouthpiece and told Gaboreau to say "Yes" when I removed the hand.

He was slow to do it, and the irascible old fellow shouted back:

"What's the matter with you? Why don't you answer? Take all night! Answer me, you fool!"

I GENTLY hung up the receiver. To try further to deceive the suspicious old tiger might lead to complications. But since he thought Charles had telephoned from the Tremaine, he would be trying to get the Tremaine connection again so as to continue his scolding.

"You can explain to your superior when you see him—again. He seems to be quite wrathy. Rather the usual thing with the old fellow. And since he has given instructions to you to have somebody watch me carefully, I think that I will see that you are watched.

"You asked to have George relieve you. What that means I don't know. But you will be good enough to explain and explain in detail. You have lied to me several times this evening, but I don't think you had better do it again. I am going to meet George. I want a letter from you—a note—something that will assure him that I am

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a friend and to be trusted. When I go out of this room I am going to tell Yang that if I do not return in two hours he will know your letter trapped me, and that he shall then cut your throat. Do you understand, Yang?"

Yang nodded his head profoundly.

"Now, Mr. Gaboreau, explain."

He went as far as to insist, perhaps truthfully, that George had not been called into the affair with Jessie at all, but had been attending to other work—though often all of them worked together.

He was ready to explain about George. But, he said none of the Gaboreaus were ever seen together, and that when one relieved the other it was usually done in a saloon. They kept the appointment to the second. One entered the front door and went toward the rear. The other entered the rear and went toward the front, so it appeared to any one who chanced to be standing by either door that the same man had come in and gone right out again by the same door.

I did not, and still do not understand fully why that arrangement was used. But I suppose there was a good reason. I have an idea that the two men, instead of passing each other in the saloon, usually went into a back room and had a confidential talk over the matter at hand. In that case there was reason enough to make sure that they did not enter by the same door or leave together.

"George is to meet you at the Crystal saloon at what time?" I asked.

"Twelve-thirty."

"It is almost that now. I am sorry, but I do not believe you will be able to keep the appointment. And now another question—one asked before: who is Franklin De Mey?"

"I don't know."

"Are you sure?"

"I am."

I looked hard at him. I could not understand the secrecy that enveloped De Mey. I believed that the man was lying. I did not tell him so in words, but in manner. That is, I made a slight movement with my hand and Yang's glittering blade almost touched Gaboreau's throat.

Gaboreau sprang backward, slightly raising both hands, palms outward, and a spasm of fear wrenched his face. The dazzling blade of Yang's played before his eyes.

"Tell me, quick. Who is Franklin De Mey?" I asked again.

"Stop that devil! Ugh—stop him! I don't know. But stop him—he'll kill me!" Gaboreau shouted hoarsely, his nerves broken down at last, and he shrank from the weazened, lithe Chinaman.

"Very well," I said, putting a hand on Yang and drawing him back. "But why don't you tell me. You have one more chance."

Gaboreau dropped his arms and leaned against the table.

"I can't tell you. I don't know. Gaboreau—the real Gaboreau—never tells us anything. We get orders and carry them out. We are orderlies, as you said. I know there is such a man as Franklin De Mey, but who he is or what he has done or where he is to be found, I do not know."

"And the girl—where has she been taken?"

"I don't know."

"Who took her?"

"I don't know. Felix was to prevent you from helping her. That is all I know. Gaboreau tells us nothing. We know nothing."

"You don't even know about Kingston?" I said, mentioning the millionaire who, so the inspector thought, Gaboreau had had murdered because he threatened to expose the gambling layout in the De Meyervelt home.

That question nearly paralyzed him. He stared at me in utter amazement. Then—either in astonishment or to throw me off guard—he asked in awed tones—

"Did Gaboreau do that?"

"Really," I said, concealing my ignorance under a bluff, "from the way you ask questions one would think that *you* had brought *me* here to find out things. I must remind you that it is the other way around. And," I went on, "you all take orders from the real Gaboreau at Stillwater Place?"

"Yes."

"Are you black-beards brothers?"

"Felix and I are. That is why we work together. We are twins. No one can hardly tell us apart. We can not work with Robert or George. The difference might be noticed."

"But they come to the Tremaine often?"

Again he seemed to be surprised that I knew so much about their movements. He admitted that they did, but always

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early in the morning when there were few people about.

"Now then," I said looking at my watch and noticing that I had no time to spare, "you will write a note to my dictation."

He wrote it. And when it was finished, I bound and gagged him, put a pillow under his head and placed him beside his brother on the floor.

I opened the door suddenly and found Jessie in a kimono hunched over where the keyhole had been.

She gasped and blushed and did not know what to say.

"Oh, Mr. Everhard," she began, "can't I help in some way? I would dearly love to. I feel that I ought. Really I do. I didn't mean to listen, but I just couldn't help it. I am so excited. I do so want to learn about Franklin."

"I see."

"Is there anything I can do?" she asked hysterically.

"Yes. Go to bed and stay there."

She was not offended at my bruskness. She thought I was in justifiable anger at having found her at the keyhole. I did not care how many keyholes she was at. I wanted Vivian. Had it not been for this girl I would not have thrust Vivian into trouble. But I was not blaming the girl for that. It was no fault of hers. I was not blaming myself. I never blame myself. I try to do the best I can at the time and if I am beaten I figuratively shrug my shoulders and take the loss. But Vivian was a loss that I would not endure.

I meant that Antoine Gaboreau should humbly return my wife. I would take his black-beards as hostages until he would be left without captains, orderlies or whatever use to which he put them. I wanted to cut off his supports, and I intended to add George to my collection of black-beards.

So I hurried from the apartment and securing a taxi drove rapidly to the Crystal saloon.

ON THE second the black-beard, George, appeared through the side door. He glanced about him, hesitated, stopped at the bar for a drink, and all the while looked around in a way that seemed to me to indicate restlessness.

I moved close to where he was standing and without a word slipped a folded piece of paper along the bar to the side of his glass.

He gave me a flashing, searching look. But I said nothing. I made no sign.

Then he picked up the paper and read what I had dictated:

> The bearer will show you the way. Important.
> CHARLES.

I had not said, "the bearer can be trusted," or that sort of thing. I expected him to think that I could be trusted or I would not have been given the note.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am not expected," I replied, "to either ask or to answer questions."

His was a thinner face than those of the other two I had met, a trifle thinner and more keen. He did not impress me as being catlike. There was something of the hawk about him. His nose was more prominent than theirs were. But he looked like the others, remarkably like them. But then I found afterward that these men had been selected because they did look alike and had been trained to cultivate the resemblance and the same mannerisms, so that it was very difficult to distinguish them; especially when they were not together.

"You are not to answer questions, eh?" he said dubiously, glaring at me.

"I am not," I repeated.

"How do I know," he said, dropping his voice, "that this is not a forgery?"

"You don't, I suppose, if you are not able to recognize the handwriting."

"Nothing of this kind has ever happened before," he went on, tapping the note with a long forefinger while he looked hard into my face.

"I know nothing about that."

"You seem to be quite self-sufficient, my man," he said coldly.

"I can't see that that has anything to do with—" and I indicated the note—"It was given to me—and I delivered it. I said I would."

"Why couldn't he come himself?"

"It would perhaps be better to ask him when you meet again. I am not familiar with Charles's business."

"Have you worked with him?" George asked encouragingly.

"As you might surmise, we are not total strangers. And if you care to come with me," I added bluffing, "all right. If you don't——"

I left the sentence unfinished and turned slowly as though to leave. I tried my best

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not to appear to care in the least one way or the other whether he came. And of course, since he thought that was the case, he was ready to come.

It was easy to get him into my apartment-house, only I wondered what some close observer might think, if there had been any, who saw me come down alone and return each time with what appeared to be the same man. But I was confident that there were no observers keeping so strict a watch as to tell whether or not I had come in with three men that looked alike, though none left my rooms after being shown into them.

I did not say one word to George all of the way. I preferred not to try to assuage what suspicions he might have lest I make him the more suspicious in trying to reassure him. In other words, I was trying to outguess him, just as every poker player who has a degree of success must outguess a dozen times a night the man before him. I figured that if George was suspicious of me he might become more so if I tried to be affable. But if I appeared to be indifferent to what he thought, and not seem to care in the least whether he came with me, I reasoned that he would be sure that I was not acting like one who has a trap baited.

I have been led into and have barely escaped so many traps myself that I know the easiest way to disarm suspicion is not to be agreeable. It is all part of the great science called bluff upon which poker is founded. And if the college courses in psychology included a thorough grounding in the fine points of poker, I am of the opinion that the cherished sheepskin would more nearly approximate the value at which the annual freshet of graduates hold it.

When we came to the door of my apartment, I stepped forward as though to open it.

One hand was on the knob—when I turned and poked an automatic hard against his stomach.

"Not a sound or move from you," I said, throwing open the door.

He hesitated just the barest instant, then lifted his hands into the air.

"It is just as well," I remarked, "that you did not try to reach for the vitriol gun in your side coat pocket, or for the knife in your belt, or for the miniature gun in your vest pocket. Now just step inside."

He did so. I shut the door.

"You can see," I went on, "I am holding something of a reception for Gaboreaus this evening. It might be called a get-together meeting."

He was seeing, too. He stared and stared at the two men on the floor, till I touched his arm and told him that he had better take notice of my friend, Yang Li. Then for the first time he seemed to notice the wicked knife that gleamed like a serpent's tongue in Yang's hand.

Before I started questioning Gaboreau No. 3 Yang called my attention to a message which he had painfully tried to make clear on a writing pad. Guernsey had telephoned that he was coming up to the apartment at once. Yang with difficulty managed to make clear that Guernsey had said much more, but that he did not understand it. He made signs that Guernsey had been excited. Yang could never understand why anybody should be excited at any time over anything.

Then Gaboreau No. 3 went through the process of being searched and of answering questions. He was keen-brained and no doubt lied from first to last, but he lied well. He told me nothing that I did not already know, and pretended ignorance of much that I did know. He claimed to have never heard of Franklin De Mey; but he had heard of the millionaire Kingston and seemed surprised when I suggested that the old man of Stillwater Place was responsible for the millionaire's murder.

These black-beards were such adroit liars and actors that I probably credited them with knowing more than they did. It is barely possible that no one of them did know just what affairs the old man at Stillwater Place did interest himself in.

When I had finished with Gaboreau No. 3, I gagged and bound him and placed him beside his black-bearded brothers. Robert, the fourth and so far as I knew the last, would not be where I could get at him for some time. I could not very well break into the exclusive De Meyervelt home and carry him off. But I thought possibly I might arrange to attend to him later in the morning.

I knew very well that I was getting myself into the predicament of the man who caught a bull by the tail. As long as I held on to the Gaboreaus I was safe enough. But I could not keep them prisoners forever, and as soon as I turned them loose—the horns of the bull would be at me.

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I did not see just how I was going to arrange it, but I knew that in some way I would have to make arrangement of one kind or another to keep them permanently out of my way—not for days or months, but for years. That was more easily hoped for than accomplished; but there is no problem without its solution. There is a way out of every difficulty, and I meant to keep on the alert and find the way to deal with my three desperate black-bearded gentlemen—as well as with the one that remained uncaught, and the tigerish old fellow also who had a lair in Stillwater Place.

HAS YANG had said Guernsey was coming to my apartment, I thought it would be best for me to wait for him down-stairs, for no doubt Jessie was again at the keyhole and would likely remain there until she thought I was about to open the door. I was not yet of the opinion that it would be well for her to know he was in the city. She was still infatuated with that elusive De Mey, and until I discovered something about him I did not see how I could essay the rôle of Cupid and turn her eyes welcomingly toward Mr. Guernsey. I was much less interested in his love affair than when I had first concerned myself with it, for with Vivian's disappearance I had developed troubles of my own, but still I thought it well to serve him as best I could.

I went down-stairs to the unlighted reception-room, having first awakened the boy at the telephone switch and told him that if any one called, I would answer it from down there. I did not know but that Guernsey would telephone again.

I had not been seated long before I heard the buzzer and the boy called me. The call, however, was not from Guernsey. And as soon as I picked up the receiver the sound of the voice out of it gave me a thrill. It was the voice of the real Gaboreau.

"Everhard," he said, "your time's up. Tell me where Felix is or you'll be dead inside of an hour. You were seen to drive off with him tonight from in front of the Oriel Café. He has not been seen since. What did you do with him?"

I shut one eye and looked at the ceiling while my brain hummed like a motor on a grade. I was not ready to have suspicion turned on me. It might prove embarrassing.

But as long as I had been seen only driving off with Felix I thought there was a chance to wiggle out of the situation. Yes, so long as I had not been seen driving off with the other two Gaboreaus I felt that my hour of life might be extended indefinitely; so I pretended to be the dupe. But first I acted as though I did not understand of what he was talking, and why he should be suspicious of me.

He was soon worked into an apoplectic rage. Then I made him think—or at least I tried to make him think—that I had got into the car with Felix under the impression that Felix would pursue the taxi that had carried off a woman in whom I was interested. I explained also that though we had tried to locate the taxi, it had evaded us.

It was not easy to fool that clever old man, but I at least succeeded in mystifying him. He must have thought me the veriest of fools to have permitted Felix to get me into the car under the pretense of chasing that taxi. But I had been seen to get into the car. He knew that. I told him that after we lost sight of the taxi, Felix had brought me almost back to my apartment and then I had left the car.

I admit that I was using a lawyer's license with the truth; but then—one can't be squeamish when trying to hoodwink the devil. He hung up on me abruptly, so I did not know exactly what he thought.

But that telephone message made me rapidly decide upon a scheme I had been turning over and over in my mind just before he telephoned. So I wrote a note, called a messenger and sent it to Jerry Kelly. I disliked to get the reputable teamster out of bed in the wee hours of the morning on a lawless enterprise; but I needed a husky burglar.

GUERNSEY arrived at last. He was very excited. No doubt he had reason to be excited. He had got into the De Meyervelt home without difficulty, thanks to the companion Johnny Blix had picked out for him, and at once had been taken up-stairs to the gaming rooms.

These rooms were fitted out in gold-and-black lacquered furniture, and hung with heavy curtains of black velvet. A soft glow of yellow light from hidden bulbs fell from the ceiling. Thick Chinese rugs were on the floors; and soft-footed servants in livery passed continually back and forth serving liquors and cigarets.

Guernsey had arrived early, and only

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one of the roulette tables was running for the handful of people, mostly young men, who were already there and eager to play. There had been no introductions. As soon as he was inside his companion had left him and Guernsey did not see him again.

Guernsey looked about, but saw no one resembling Gaboreau. Then he sat down at the table. The people already playing seemed to take him for granted as one of themselves. Comments passed to and fro. More people came in and the wheel of another table was in motion.

Guernsey persisted in winning. He said that luck seemed to be infatuated with him. Once he made a desperate bet and won—then he let the money ride; and it rode on the red for seven times before it lost. His companions had advised him to pull it down. One young woman had begged with him not to tempt fortune after the fourth winning ride, and grew almost hysterical each spin after that. She talked so much and so loudly that attention was attracted to his daring play and people gathered around. The amount, when he did lose, was enormous, having doubled six times. But the blasé croupier had said there was no objections to a bet of any size whatever—and high stakes were the rule at De Meyervelt's.

Guernsey said that those who looked on were not justified in regarding him as a plunger, for he was sorely tempted to pull down after the bet had doubled three times and it became more difficult to let it ride each whirl thereafter.

The seventh turn of the wheel took the pile, and singing his monotonous formula, the croupier had reached out and gathered in the pyramid of chips.

Guernsey tried to take the loss calmly, and he said that he was sure he did take it calmly for every one around seemed to look at him admiringly, and some spoke of the nonchalance with which he had lost. Then a hand had clapped him heartily on the shoulder, and a voice that made him jump said:

"Some sport, my boy. Some sport. A regular plunger. Didn't know you had it in you!"

Guernsey looked up straight into the face of Franklin De Mey.

In his own words, Guernsey was too flabbergasted to say anything but a surprised—

"Hello!"

De Mey had added:

"Come to our wicked city to have a little fling, eh? Excuse me a minute. I have to see a fellow. Then I'll come right back and we'll have a chat over old times."

And Guernsey let him get away.

He had sat there like a chump for the next hour and a half impatiently waiting for De Mey to come back—and expecting him to come back. Guernsey was about as innocent as a babe of the way of this world's rascals.

After about an hour and a half he had walked around and made inquiries for De Mey, but no one seemed to know him. Yet, Guernsey said, De Mey had appeared perfectly at home as though entirely familiar with the place.

Along toward midnight the tall, black-bearded man whom he recognized as Gaboreau had appeared, passing suavely through the crowd, bowing and speaking on all sides of him. Then Guernsey had walked up and bluntly asked Gaboreau if he knew Franklin De Mey and where he could be located. That Gaboreau was, of course, the one known to me as Robert.

"He looked at me in the strangest way," Guernsey reported, "and hesitated. Then he answered coldly that he did not have the pleasure of knowing a Mr. De Mey. Then after the briefest pause he wanted to know why I had asked *him* about De Mey.

"I told him that I had known De Mey in Los Angeles, and mentioned how I had seen him a few minutes before. I also explained that De Mey was about the only person in the city that I did know, and that naturally I would like to get in touch with him.

"I think the old boy doubted me at that. But he acted a bit more civil. Only he couldn't remember any De Mey. He said however that he would inquire around. I waited quite a while, then he came up and said that he had made inquiries, but no one seemed to know my friend.

"It's the queerest thing I was ever up against, Mr. Everhard. What do you make of it?"

Instead of explaining what I thought, which would probably have caused me to offend Mr. Guernsey by letting him know that I considered him something of a bungler to have let De Mey get out of his sight, I asked Mr. Guernsey if he was ready to take a bigger chance than letting a bet ride seven

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times on the red? He promptly said that he would take any kind of a chance.

"It is both lawless and dangerous."

"I don't give a ——," he replied.

"It may get into your home town papers —if we fail."

"Let it get there. I'm on. Name it."

Then I told him how Vivian, while impersonating Jessie, had been thrown into a taxi that dashed away and left me stranded in the middle of the street.

He wanted to know at once why I had not given chase to the disappearing taxi; and I explained again that the one I was in had been designedly wrecked as the other flashed out of sight.

"I'd like to be at the wheel and follow those—" Mr. Guernsey's words became unprintable.

But he spoke with a note of fierceness in his voice that showed me that, for all of his thick-headedness, Mr. Guernsey was capable of making things lively for parties that might get in his way. And I remembered too, that I had heard by telegraph that he had been a racer in his day, and no doubt a reckless and skilful one. He had enough of the bulldog in his jaw to indicate the fellow of grit.

"I don't think there will be any racing," I said. "And I hope there will be no fighting, but I rather fancy we shall have some kind of trouble. I'd rather not have it though."

So I bundled Mr. Guernsey into a taxi and we drove off to keep my appointment with Jerry Kelly.

VII

I LEFT Guernsey in the machine and went into the saloon to find Jerry. He was sitting alone at a table toward the rear, sipping a glass of beer.

Jerry was a big, bulky fellow with an undershot jaw, steady eyes and a tread light as a panther walking over hot coals. He moved with an ease, an unhurried slowness, a deliberation that not only had something of grace in it—if "grace" may be applied to a bulky burglar—but also indicated the man who used his head. Most crooks are merely cunning. They have little of the quality called "brains," and that is why so many of them are easily caught and so few reform.

Jerry arose and put out a big, rough hand.

"Anything to sit down and talk over, Mr. Everhard?" he asked.

"Nothing, Jerry. I am sorry to drag you out like this, but——"

"Nobody's being dragged. I'm sure glad to do it. The little lady is sure glad to have me, too, Mr. Everhard. She said, 'Jerry, if Mr. Everhard wants you it means he's in trouble. And you get him out.'

"So I went out in the back-yard and spaded up my onion-bed and pulled out the kit of tools I had cached. She knew I had 'em, too. When I stowed 'em away she objected. But I said, 'Bess, I hope I'll never have to use 'em again. But they're the best set that was ever made. I couldn't replace 'em for a thousand dollars, and I'm not going to give 'em to anybody.'

"She didn't like for me to keep 'em. But I explained that it would be good for my will power if I had 'em around. The little lady's strong on the will-power stuff. So we compromised on a burial out in the garden. Put 'em under the onions in case the police picked me up again on suspicion and started looking over the premises. I'm ready, Mr. Everhard. You said it was to be a 'job.' I haven't forgot how."

He asked no questions, but picked up a little brown satchel that was under the table, pulled his cap low over his eyes and waited for me.

"Jerry, I want to get into a house where I know people are in it and awake. I have an idea the house is rigged with alarms, too. I know the party inside is inclined to take all manner of precautions in other respects, so I wouldn't be surprised if he was provided with burglar-alarms. The servants are deaf—but he isn't."

"Easy money, just as long as there's no dogs in the house. I hate a white woolly poodle worse 'an all the mechanical devices ever invented. Burglar-alarms are kid's toys. Just so there's no poodle around. They yap their fool heads off and you can't shut 'em up."

"I don't know the first thing about this house except that it is surrounded by large grounds—comparatively large, with plenty of shade. But I am of the opinion that there will be all manner of electrical contrivances rigged up to the windows and doors."

"Don't let a little thing like that worry you, Mr. Everhard. I'm ready."

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So I took him out to the taxi and introduced him to Mr. Guernsey.

We drove to within a few blocks of Stillwater Place, got out and sent the taxi on its way. Then I told Jerry the number of the house and placed matters entirely in his hands.

It was a pleasant night, not chilly, just comfortable with a light coat; but there was altogether too much moon for men who were not lying abed. I would have preferred a dark, a black night, as witnesses were not needed for the work I had at hand. But the moon was full and bright, and seemed like a huge bulb swung in the heavens.

We all walked together to within about a block of the house. Guernsey was so nervous he felt chilly and turned up his coat, and looked into the shadows like a timid boy expecting something to leap out at him. Not that he was afraid—he was nervous, unused to adventure.

About a block from the house Jerry told us to wait while he went forward and had a chance to look the place over. And he left us, slipping from shadow to shadow noiselessly as an Indian approaching a camp-fire from behind little clumps of sage.

Guernsey and I took a hiding-place behind the hedge fence in some good citizen's yard, who no doubt little thought to what nefarious use his ornamental hedge might be put. We stood together and said nothing; or crouched silently as a car whirred in the distance as though it might come along our street, and I listened alertly for the footsteps of any conscientious policeman who might be making the rounds of his beat. But the silence of night hung over the city, the silence of a city that had died. Guernsey could not be calm. The unaccustomed thrill of being abroad on an errand forbidden by the law was stimulating to his nerves, and he moved his feet about and drew out and peered at his watch every half-minute.

The wait was so long that I began to fear that Jerry had encountered a policeman. I wondered if the inspector might not still have men shadowing the house, though I had been informed that he had withdrawn his watchers.

Also, I began to ponder more deliberately the scheme of breaking into the house and encountering the old man, and to wonder if after all it were feasible. He would undoubtedly be an alert fellow. Perhaps he might still be up. I was forced to conclude that the plan was not what I would call feasible. But that made no difference. If one limits himself to doing only feasible things the chances are that he will not do much. And though I dislike to take chances, to rush in without the faintest idea of what I am to get into—still, if I have to do that sort of thing I try to arrange it so the other fellow will do most of the worrying.

The merest sound but a few feet from me made me turn swiftly. Jerry, having come up silently, was almost at my side.

"It's a pipe," he said softly. "Lights burning—somebody up, but that's all right. No dogs about the grounds and no signs of bones at the back porch or in the garbage-can. Went through it. Even the poodles get bones you know. So I don't think there's a thing that will yap. I looked the place over. Big garage in back. Locked—or was. Went in and had a look.

"Big machine there, and room for another. Been housing two machines. Located the kitchen of the house. It's the one room where nobody's likely to come. Light upstairs in the front of the house. But we'll go through the kitchen. I can't tell yet, but I think it's wired with alarms. They'll make us take a little more time, that's all. No trouble to beat burglar-alarms. Think all the burglars are going to starve just because electricians need work? Nothin' doin'.

"You and Mr. Guernsey go on first, walk past the house, then turn to your left and cut down through the alley and cut back to the house and wait for me. I'll stick around and follow to make sure no cop spots you and starts to follow. Wait for me by the left of the garage. It's dark there. Some kind of a vine there."

As Guernsey started off, Jerry caught him by the arm and hissed into his ear:

"You—don't make so much noise with your feet. Better take off your shoes after you get out of the alley. An' don't holler if you step on a tack. Keep still if it kills you."

Guernsey said nothing, and he tried to follow instructions. But about a half block later his curiosity made him ask questions. He was walking as though trying to step on egg-shells without breaking them—but he would have smashed hard-boiled eggs,

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at that—when he said in a stage whisper—

"Are we going to break into a house?"

"We are," I said, looking at him closely to see how he would take it.

"Lord!" he said impulsively.

"You may go back—if you wish."

"Not much! I haven't been so scared since I went into my first road race—and I like it."

Mr. Guernsey had wrongly diagnosed his feeling. There is a difference between being scared and being nervous. As far as being actually afraid was concerned, I was probably much more so than he. I am seldom nervous. But I was afraid my plan might be bungled in some detail; and a bungle—well, bridges are built to be crossed when one reaches them and to be burned afterward.

Mr. Guernsey could not help this nervousness. As we were sneaking down the alley, hugging the shadow of a board fence, something leaped from the ground before us and passed over the fence at one bound.

Guernsey jumped almost as high and said—

"My God!"

"If you were an Egyptian," I remarked, cynically, "your words might be appropriate. That was a cat—merely a cat—and a black one, too."

All cats look black at night—if they are in the shadows.

"Are you superstitious?" he asked in a thrilling whisper.

"Very," I said. "I believe it is bad luck when on a quiet and secret little enterprise for a man with a voice strong as your own to use it."

That silenced him.

AFTER a wait in the shadow by the garage, during which I stared at the faint light that could be seen coming from a side window on the second floor of the house and wondered how soon I would be using it to read the riddle of Gaboreau, Jerry came up. He came so quietly that he was almost beside us before either saw him.

"Now, Mr. Guernsey," he said, "you take off your shoes and move down through that arbor, work your way around the house and lay down behind the rose-bush just back of the front porch. You can watch the street. If you see anybody turn in, come back and tell us."

"I'm not going in with you?" Guernsey asked in disappointment.

"Not much." Then Jerry added, looking at me, "unless Mr. Everhard——"

"You're the strategist, Jerry," I whispered.

"You mean I'm the doctor?" he asked, doubtfully.

"That's it," I assured him.

"All right. Mr. Guernsey, if you're careful, you don't need to take them shoes off. But work your way up to the rose-bushes. We'll wait till you get settled. And for Heaven's sake, walk on your hands!

"Some feet!" he added to me as we listened to the soft crunch of Guernsey's shoes on the gravel under the arbor.

When we were sure that Guernsey had had time to get settled into the place behind the rose-bushes, we carefully approached the house.

The hushed silence of the early morning hours made the slightest rustle of the leaves audible. It seemed to be a bad night for the work at hand. From time to time little night-noises would creak and crack, something would chirp, or a winged insect would sing its song at my ear—noises that would not be noticed unless one's nerves were tense.

Jerry bent over his satchel and reached in. I could hear the soft clink of metal that he unwrapped from oiled cloths as he selected the needed tools.

He stood up, and putting his lips against my ear, said in the slightest of whispers:

"This is something new. Ain't many on to the trick. Takes time, but watch."

I watched. There was so much light in the moon-filled sky that, though we stood in the shadows, my eyes became accustomed enough to what darkness there was by the kitchen window to see quite distinctly; and I could see him carefully oiling a small drill, which he wrapped with heavy flannel before he started to use it, and only the point remained uncovered.

He placed the point of the drill against the lower left-hand corner of the window-pane, and I could hear the dull, soft grind as the diamond-point bit into the glass.

It seemed to me at the time to make a great deal of noise, but he told me afterward that by actual test, since it was very important to him to know it, he could bore into glass and the boring would not be

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heard a hundred feet away even by one listening for it. I had been standing less than three feet.

The first hole made in the pane was not so large as a pin head. But then with infinite patience he set to work and drilled those small holes until he had made one hole large enough to poke a finger into.

"It will go fast from now on," he whispered carefully.

Then, holding his finger through the hole, and pressing with it from the inside against the glass to deaden the sound, he used a glass-cutter and cut a small piece no larger than a dime. He muffled the glass with a triple fold of flannel that deadened the snap, then broke off the piece outlined by the glass-cutter, and this piece was laid carefully on the ground so that there would not be the slightest clink.

Taking piece by piece, he worked until he had made an opening large enough to poke his hand through; then he began cutting and removing larger pieces of glass, and at no time was there more of a sound than the soft snap with which he broke off the pieces that had been cut.

In less than an hour's time he had slightly more than half of the window out, and the rest came quickly.

But before venturing to climb through, he carefully repacked his tools and locked the satchel and handed it to me.

"Pass it in to me when I crawl through. Always keep 'em with me in case I have to make a break for it."

Then he climbed noiselessly through the window, paused, listening for a moment, and disappeared into the blackness within the house.

I waited for some time before his head again appeared at the window, and I stepped closer, while he whispered so low that his words could not have been heard at an arm's length:

"Unlocked the back-door for you. Had a burglar-proof catch on it. This window's wired, too! Guess we had the right hunch."

He said it with a note of glee, as the master craftsman speaks when he has circumvented the ingenuity of those who try to beat him.

I then handed the satchel in to him and, going carefully to the back-door, stepped into the dark kitchen. In a few minutes my eyes were accustomed to the darkness within the house, and I followed Jerry across the room.

Slowly he opened a door that led out of the kitchen. It might lead into a room where some one was sleeping. It might lead into a room where some one who had heard us, despite precautions, was waiting with an automatic shotgun. It might lead into any peril; that is the dreadful anxiety of passing through a door in a strange house. But presumably it opened into the dining-room. It did.

We stepped into that. Each step was taken with extreme caution, with breathless care. We did not walk. We merely placed one foot down, and then a few seconds later advanced the other, and all the while strained every nerve to listen.

Presently Jerry stopped. He turned and caught my arm.

I thought his ear, perhaps keener than mine, had heard some suspicious sound; and instantly I was on guard—an automatic in each hand, and my eyes peering forward to detect the outline of any one who happened to be in the room. But no one was to be seen. He indicated that we were to go back, but I shook my head. I was not ready to turn back.

But he insistently made signs; he did not dare even a noiseless whisper. They indicated that we were to go back into the kitchen and then return.

I followed him into the kitchen, where he whispered:

"I forgot Guernsey. Wait till I tell him if he hears anything suspicious while we are in the house that he is to throw gravel against the window. Then we'll know somebody is coming and have time to get out."

I did not think much of the suggestion one way or the other. I had given Guernsey no thought after he had disappeared into the rose-bushes. In the little affairs to which I give my attention from time to time I am usually alone and never have to think of confederates. I have found it more convenient. There is less chance of bungling, and if there is any bungling one always knows who is to blame.

So far I have been able to take care of myself. Perhaps that is because, even when I am not the aggressive party, I try usually to have a surprise of some kind up my sleeve. True, the surprise is usually the two automatics that rest in my side

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coat pockets—but from there they speak unhesitatingly and with a degree of accuracy that is usually effective.

I was glad to have the opportunity to suggest to Jerry that he could go out and tell Guernsey and I would go on alone, that I preferred to do so, that both he and Guernsey could keep watch on the outside, and that if he thought it necessary to warn me of any one's approach, not to throw gravel, but bricks.

"Throw something that I won't have to stop and listen to hear," I told him.

Jerry was disappointed that I wished to go it alone; but he said that he guessed it would be all right.

As a last word he warned me not to walk up the stairs.

"Pull yourself up the banisters," he said. "One of the steps is probably wired to ring a bell when your foot touches it. That's part of the burglar-alarm system. There's wires all over the house. If we'd raised that window instead of taking out the glass we'd have had a patrol wagon down on us by this time."

"All right. I'll try the banisters. And I'll make out all O. K., Jerry."

"Probably will, but I'd like to help."

"You've helped—more than helped, you have made possible everything else I may do."

"If you want help, just call—we'll be ready," he said as he turned and went out of the back door.

I turned the other way and again went into the dining-room. The first door I opened off that led into the hallway, but I did not go out at once. I opened all the other doors and made sure of what would lay at my rear when I had passed on. It was slow work, done painfully cautiously—this poking about over the ground floor of the house; and I do not believe that I made more than the faintest of sounds.

WHEN I came again into the hallway and looked at the curving banisters, I hesitated and thought it might be safer to use the stairs. But Jerry was an authority on the protective equipment used in houses that feared intruders. Yet to slide along up those banisters was a feat that required the greatest of care if it were to be done silently.

But I climbed on to the banisters and slowly, inch by inch, pulled myself up.

Before I reached the top I could see that the room where the light was burning was at the head of the stairs; had the door open, wide open, and the light was shining through.

I was afraid lest I had made some noise that attracted attention and that some watcher was waiting for me. But I had been as silent as a serpent. I determined to go on, and cautiously, barely moving, stopping to peer up and ready to fight my way forward if need be, I finally made my way to the top and gained the upper hallway.

Then standing back from the light thrown through the open door, I could see the profile of a man who sat slumped in a deep swivel-chair before a broad desk.

A row of filing-cases lay on the desk; and about the room, on shelves, were other filing-cases, much like the orderly records in an attorney's filing office. I wondered at the enormous amount of labor and material represented; and wondered also what it was all about.

The man Gaboreau, the real Gaboreau, was beardless, bald and old. His chin and nose almost touched, as is often noticed in the features of toothless, withered old men. But his chin was sharp, and his nose was long and sharp and beaked. He was bald as a vulture and had the beak of an eagle. There was more than cunning in his face; the broad forehead, the full-rounded skull, much too large for his frail body, showed plainly enough from where came the intellectual power that had baffled and defied the police and made the name Gaboreau one of sinister mystery.

I may have no liking for such as he; but I admire strong men whether or not they are wicked. It has been my fortune to come upon some of the strongest; and though I wish for what credit is mine, yet it must have been observed by those who know something of me that I have almost always caught them at a disadvantage.

The average fellows, even those with some ability, give me little trouble. Surely enough, they can strike in the dark; but they must be driven to do it, and told when and how and where, and likely as not be inspired with drink or drugs before they dare. Few crooks work alone. Most criminals work in gangs. And that gang is short lived that has no powerful head behind it.

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Long ago I learned that, so when involved with crook or gang, I ever reach out and up until I come to the saturnine intellect that dominates the crooks and gangsters. There is always such an intellect behind each criminal organization—sometimes a Napoleonic mind, but often enough, fortunately for the peace of law and society, a mind of lesser proportions that meets its Waterloo without even having known Marengo.

But few men—none in just the same way—have ever impressed me as that fierce old man who sat in the deep chair with his head bent forward. I might have thought that he was asleep but that now and then he lifted his hand to the edge of the table and tapped noiselessly with his lean, fragile fingers.

No doubt he felt secure, not only because he believed he had effectively concealed his own identity behind the mask of four black-beards, but with his house equipped with alarms against intruders—especially needed alarms because his servants were deaf. But it is in moments of security that even countries as well as men are taken unawares. What failures I have made—they have been more numerous than I shall indicate—have almost always been due to that form of security which underestimates the quality of the man that must be beaten. Warned by such failures, I have developed a hypersensitive caution. I may sometimes put a butterfly on the rack to make sure that it doesn't escape; but often enough the butterfly turns out to be a powerful bird and the rack is none too strong for its beating wings and powerful talons.

I wondered what sort of a rack I could put Gaboreau on. Physically, he was a weakling. But the physical is not the sum and measure of a man's strength. I could easily have covered him with one gun or two, and warned him to make no move—even as I had warned and held three of his black-beards. That is sufficient to calm and suppress all but the odd man in a million. I needed nothing more than to see him to know that he was the odd man.

He might not laugh at me; but he was one of those rare men who know that none but a fool will shoot in a quiet neighborhood, where the very report of the gun will spread a terrific alarm. Many men in a tight place forget that, or else are not able to be sure that the man behind the gun is no fool. Gaboreau would be discriminating. He would, I could see, be wary and elusive as an eel, tricky as a monkey and dangerous as a tiger.

However, I believed that I would not fail to impress him with the opinion that I was in earnest; and that when I am in earnest it is well to be attentive. While I waited, studying just what to do or say, the telephone on his desk rang. In answering it he turned in his chair so that his back was toward the door.

I listened.

"HELLO—yes—yes," he said waspishly. "It's time somebody got in touch with me. No. No. I haven't heard from Felix, Charles or George for two hours. Can't get any of them. Something's wrong. I want somebody to attend to that —— Everhard."

I stepped slowly, softly inside the door.

"What's that? What's that! Not the woman? What did that fool Felix take her for then? No wonder I can't locate him. The bungler! I won't have bunglers. Hear me. I won't."

A pause, during which Gaboreau listened.

"What kind of a muddle is this, anyway! You whelps! Yes, you too. What if he did know him by the name of De Mey in Los Angeles? You let him get away. You didn't find out who *he* was. How do you know his name was Guernsey? How do you know he ever was in Los Angeles? And that fool Frank—just because he killed Kingston is no reason I should keep him from the chair and let him play his —— fool tricks to impress some weak-minded girl. Oh, he's there now with you, is he? Feels foolish after his little bungle, does he? Ought to feel foolish—anybody that bungles. Let me talk to him. Let me talk to him, I said!"

I crouched low behind the back of his chair, so as to be out of sight in case Gaboreau glanced over his shoulder. But he was too interested in his telephone to let his eyes roam about the room. At once he began speaking with sarcasm to De Mey:

"So Everhard palmed the wrong girl off on you, did he? And you had your little theatrical for nothing! You're an idiot. Didn't I tell you when you went to California not to take that name. Didn't I?

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Didn't I tell you to take a real alias or keep your own? That —— Everhard is after you and I hope to God he gets you! He will, too. You idiot. You'd bungle if you tried to take a bone away from a blind pup.

"Somebody called over this wire—my private wire—this afternoon and said: 'Franklin De Mey is in trouble!' Who did it? Everhard, of course. You bring that girl here to have me kidnap her so you can frame up a fake rescue—then let her fall into his hands. You—you pretty, pampered, tin-horned piker, you half-baked swell, you society hanger-on—you want to play the hero!

"What's that? What's that! Kingston? For me! You dirty little liar. You know why you shot him. Don't say you did it for me! Don't say it! You did it for yourself and your precious uncle. I know he'd be ruined but for the rake-off I give him. I use his house—yes. He begged me to. You begged me to. You killed Kingston to save your graft—and I had to tell you how to do it. I covered your tracks. And now you—you want to marry an heiress and settle down. 'Oh, please, Monsieur Gaboreau, this means more to me than anything else you can do! Please let me engineer this all by myself. Just let me show you'—well, you've shown me!

"I was a fool, too. Everhard trapped you with those personals in the paper. You thought he didn't catch you, but he did. Don't you suppose he knew how you got his name and address! And you let him catch me, too. You —— fool. I told you not to take that name, De Mey, and then you have that girl write you at the Tremaine. Idiot. Stupid idiot. And when she came to the Oriel that night—you were standing across the street from the Oriel watching.

"Felix is a fool, too. Let Everhard bluff him out. And you and Felix sent a man in to watch him and follow him, and he chased that fellow off. Why didn't you watch him and follow him yourself? You were afraid. I'd give the whole pack of you for one Everhard. Who is he, anyway? How'd he get that name? Bogus name—how'd he get it?

Another pause.

"Gambler, oh, I know that. I know his reputation, too. He cleaned up the Bowers gang in San Francisco. I know that. But where did he come from? Who is he—not what is his name? Don't know? Of course not. You don't know anything Of course you don't know why he's butting in. He butts in because he wants to. Money has nothing to do with it. All men are not like you. Let me talk to Robert again—but don't you go away."

Again a pause, and Robert evidently took the receiver at the other end of the line.

"Robert, where in the devil is Felix and George and Charles? I've been waiting hours for you to call me. Because I'm a helpless old man you think you can ignore me. Think I'm slipping, eh? You do too. Shut up. I know you've been busy at De Meyervelts'. You're always busy when I want something. Everybody's busy then. Charles was supposed to come here tonight and help me with the records. Got George to relieve him about twelve. Then I couldn't get anybody at the Tremaine. Clerk said Charles was suddenly taken sick and removed to the hospital. Clerk's a fool. I don't know what's the matter. Frank has put a hoodoo on me—everything goes wrong since he brought that idiot of a girl here."

I realized that here was a cunning rather than a wise man; and something of a lunatic besides. Moreover, he was a cripple, helplessly shut off from the world with no outlet but the telephone for his fierce, restless mind. He could not help talking, could not help loosening vitriolic words calculated to make men wince. Naturally he did not expect to be overheard. But then, it is the unexpected that trips up the best of us. I chanced to overhear his cyncial, gossipy remarks to both De Mey and the last of his uncaptured black-beards, and I understood perfectly all that had baffled me the moment before. His wire went on:

"George pulled off a good job? Of course it was. You'll get your share, don't worry. Don't worry, Robert. I'll see that your pennies are counted out for you. Oh, yes. I know you weren't thinking of that You never are. None of you ever think of that. But my records mean more to *me* than money. You can't understand that, can you? No, you can't either. Money, money, money—that's all you judge a case by. And Frank De Meyervelt—too.

"Wants to marry for money and make his wife think he's a hero. Went to California to flirt and dropped the e-r-v-e-l-t

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because he thought it was too German-Jewish, and added an l-i-n because he thought Frank too plebeian. Oh, I know he said that wasn't the reason, but it was. I tell you it was! Don't I know him and his whole money-sucking family? All pretense. Stole the 'de' and stuck it on in front of their name—tried to hide their nationality. Ashamed of it. I tell you they are. Why do you argue with me? Shut up and let me talk a while. Umph. Haven't had a chance to say ten words.

Now, Robert, what about this woman—the one you've got? The one Everhard stacked the deck and slipped to Frank and Felix? Clever, that. I might have done it. What about her, I asked you? Why don't you answer me!

"She won't tell you who she is? She'd be a fool if she did. Laughed at Frank, eh? Then he told you and you went to see her? Oh yes, handsome Robert always goes to look at the ladies when he gets a chance.

"She is pretty, eh? Made fun of Frank and joked him about the red gloves he made her carry? Fine! Those red gloves were some more of Frank De Meyervelt's brainy engineering. Idiot! But I like that woman. Has a wedding-ring? Maybe she's Everhard's wife. Hardly? How the devil do you know he wouldn't! Not knowing what he would do has brought all this trouble.

"I don't know what he's done to Felix. Somebody's done something. He was last seen with Everhard. I had to call him up myself—couldn't get any of you busy, important men. He talked like he had done something with Felix because he very nearly made me think that he hadn't done anything. Yes, George and Charles are missing, too. Can't get anybody. How could I send somebody to watch him! Think I want every Tom, Dick and Harry to know who I am? What have I got you handsome fellows for? If I were to go about giving orders to your men I might as well have myself photographed and put in the papers.

"But what are you going to do with that woman, now that you have her? Frank wants me to help him again, eh? Idiot. You and Frank bring that woman here and let me talk to her. I'll make her say something. I like pretty women, too, you know—just as well as you. What's that? Well, come as soon as you can. I am tired of twiddling my thumbs and ringing numbers that don't answer. And be careful that Everhard don't steal that woman away from you before you get here."

He laughed as he said that and hung up abruptly. He took a deep breath and began rubbing his hands as though they were cold. Then as he turned in his chair he said meditatively to himself:

"I'd like to see that Everhard. He must be——"

I had been crouching behind the back of the chair, and as he turned on its swivel, I arose and stood erect before him. I said nothing. I made no movement. I merely stood with my arms folded and looked down into his sharp, little, gray eyes.

No doubt the quiet, uncanny manner of my appearance badly shook his nerves; but he held himself calm and slumped even deeper into his chair while he looked me up and down as an incredulous man of iron nerve might look at a ghost. He made no exclamation, no gesture; but he even bent forward and glanced at my feet, as though to reassure himself that I had not made a Mephistophelian appearance through a hole in the floor.

He breathed hard and rapidly, but otherwise he seemed calm; but obviously he was mystified, and wondering how it came that I had the suddenness of magic, and unheralded by the faintest footstep, appeared at his elbow.

His fierce eyes searched my face, took in every detail of my dress and again came back and met my own eyes. And I stared unwinkingly into his sharp, cunning features. He looked, and I knew him to be a high-tempered, irascible man; but he kept his poise. And at length when he spoke his voice had in it no note of fear, but rather a tone of petulant curiosity.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"You expressed a wish to see Everhard. I came!"

VIII

IN THE silence that followed, our eyes met and unwaveringly held. He twisted his withered lips tight and stared up at me with no trace of emotion, unless one may call his intense scrutiny an emotion. Perhaps it was. All the force of his powerful brain was concentrated in his small, deep, brilliant eyes that seemed trying to search into the hidden recesses of

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my soul for secrets of weakness, for the vulnerable, unguarded spots in my armor.

His was the face and the head of a fallen god; not a weak line amid all the traceries of age, yet the cabalism of the devil marked each feature. And be it remembered that the devil, for all his wickedness, perhaps because of it, is a brainy gentleman.

Minute after minute I stood over him and he sat, not so much with his face upturned as with upturned eyes, looking at me. We did not move. We did not speak. My arms were folded and my hands were empty. There are men to whom a show of violence is a confession of weakness. I knew him to be such a one. I knew that between him and me it was not a matter of blows, or threats or menace. Those things might come later; but in those moments we were taking the measure, each of the other.

How long I stood in silence I do not know. A clock was in the room, but I did not notice it. I did not then hear its ticking. It was no idle, abstract gaze that I focused on him; a wrestling bout with a heavier man than myself would have been less straining work, for as I stared into the bright light of his small, inscrutable eyes I was telling him who I was, what I had done and what I could do.

Not that I was consciously holding any such thought, or playing that rubbish game of mental-suggestion. But when two men who are not weaklings stand face to face they fight for dominance; and the clash of sword on buckler is oft no more decisive than the impact of eye on eye when two men stand silent and motionless.

At last he spoke. His lips barely moved, but the word was snapped out—

"Well?"

I said nothing. He had merely feinted to draw me on. To explain is to assume the defensive.

Again there was a protracted silence, then he repeated, more angrily—

"Well?"

But I did not answer.

His hand slipped forward toward the table. Whether it was done to grasp something, to press a button or test my nerves, I do not know. I stepped sidewise and interposed myself between him and the table. There was not much room for me to stand, and it brought me right up against his knees. But still I said nothing; merely stared down into his eyes.

"Who are you, anyway?" he snapped fiercely.

"Everhard."

He was incredulous, and his lips twisted into a sneer.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

What I had wanted when I came in had changed to something else. When I came I had been anxious to get through with him as quickly as possible and get away. But I had heard him tell his one uncaptured black-beard to bring Vivian to Stillwater Place; and I thought it better to wait for Vivian than to search for her.

I was no longer impatient to be through with him. I could play the waiting game with as much ease as himself, though he, too, no doubt, wished that I might stay until help of some kind came to him. I felt no need of the help for myself that was ensconced behind the rose-bushes down in the front yard; but I thought it likely that my reinforcements were more dependable than his own.

So I still said nothing. When one does not know precisely what to say it is better to remain silent and let the other fellow's imagination flounder about, than to start talking in the hope of making a lucky remark.

"I asked you what the devil you want!" he cried, hunching himself forward and placing his hands on the arms of the chair as though to lift himself up.

"You make your appeal in the name of the devil," I said enigmatically. "Is it advisable?"

I thought I might in turn test his nerves a bit further. If there was a strain of superstition in his blood I hoped to set it boiling.

"Are you the devil?" he demanded in a sharp, cynical tone.

"Are you such a stranger to him?" I asked, lowering my voice.

"What's that? What's that!"

"One of your long and varied experience should need no introduction to him."

He changed the subject abruptly by crying:

"How'd you get in here, anyway? Tell me! Tell me, I said!"

Unsmilingly I answered—

"I came—I came without touching a hand to your door or a foot to your stairs."

All that ingenuity could do he had done to keep stealthy intruders from entering

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without giving him warning; and he must have been sorely baffled in trying to guess how I made an entrance noiselessly. In fact, he blinked at me as though not quite sure that he was not after all imagining things.

"No," I said, "it is no dream."

"Oh, I know that," he snapped, as though ashamed that I had detected the thought that flashed across his mind. And at once he added in a chuckle:

"So you are the devil, are you? How do you do, Mr. Devil? Sit down. You make me nervous by standing. Sit down."

But behind his bantering there was more than jest. I was suspicious of him. I knew him capable of any villainy and any cunning, but he was so old, so thin, physically so weak that I felt as long as I kept him in the chair he would be helpless. I was not afraid of any alarm that he might give, for I knew a man who was well protected by servants would not go to such extreme in wiring his house with alarms. Servants, even deaf servants, might possibly prove troublesome, but I had little apprehension from that quarter at all.

"Sit down," he repeated, and waved an invitatory hand toward a chair at the end of the table.

But I did not take it. I had no intention of standing away from him.

"So you've come for your reckoning, Mr. Devil? All right, look at this"—and he swept his hand around the room, indicating the shelves of filing cases; but I did not take my eyes from his face—"there are your records! It's all there. I've saved your stenographers work. Why don't you sit down! Sit down. Take one of my record cases down and look through it. Why don't you take one down?"

"Perhaps, later."

"Some men collect money—like Indians did wampum. Money, bah! They call it power, Mr. Devil. But you and I know what power is! It is controlling other men. It is bending and breaking and taking from other men. It is crushing and racking and torturing—aye, it is taking their lives like putty between your fingers and making of it what shape you please!"

I began to see that the man was, as I might have suspected, close to a maniac. He was crazed by a love of crime. Almost every intense devotion to an idea is, so I have often thought, a form of insanity. The writer with his quill, the artist with his tube, the magnate with his money—all of it is that undeviating, fierce, mad lust for achievement that can not be suppressed by the will; that the writer, the artist, the magnate, does not want to suppress. But those forms only of intensity which harm society are called insane. If Gaboreau had sought to do good as he sought to do evil he might have got himself canonized, and yet been just as insane.

I understood him. He was the apotheosis of the criminal. He made of crime an art. With him it was a furious passion. He organized his men, planned, moved and struck, with the carefully developed precision of the chess-player. And as the chess-player counts his success not in money but in games won, in men baffled and defeated, and plays for the love of the playing, so Gaboreau played his ruthless game against the social group. Money was essential for hirelings; so money must be had. And he got it.

He made money one of the incentives for loyalty. There were other incentives. I eventually learned much about that fierce old fellow, and I found that no Maffian knife ever struck more readily in punishment than did his dagger when a gangster lagged or became distrusted. And those who took money from his purse were never again their own masters. Veritably, he took men's lives and molded them as putty between his fingers.

But I said nothing while he talked. My face, I am sure, showed no more than when a player across the green cloth dares me to call a bet. And he was puzzled. He had reasons for wanting me to move, to talk.

He succeeded in getting me to move, too.

I was so close to him that when he turned his swivel chair his knee struck me. He cried out in pain and clutched it.

But I did not at once step aside. I did not take my eyes off his face. Every boxer knows that as long as you watch a man's eyes the opponent can not make a gesture too quickly to have warning of it flashed from his eyes as though from a heliograph.

"Oh," he cried, as though in pain. Then swiftly he cursed me —"—— you! Can't you see my legs are withered—dried up from rheumatism! I can't walk. Here, if you must stand in front of me, let me turn this way."

He turned his chair slightly so that he

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faced the door, and I moved so that I was still close to, and before him.

"You haven't told me what you were doing here. What do you want? So you are Everhard, eh? The gambler. The hard man. Oh yes. Think you are a dangerous fellow, don't you? Supposing I was to cry for help—what would you do?"

He had been raising his voice so that the last words were uttered almost in a scream. It was a clever way to call for help—if that was his intention.

"Try it if you wish to learn," I said.

I did not know how many people were in the house, though I had heard from Johnny Blix what the police had said, and I wondered if the servants were really so deaf as not to hear his loud voice.

"I have tried it," he began, looking hard into my eyes.

Then he paused, and as he began to speak again he suddenly switched his eyes from my face and stared over my shoulder as though at some one behind me.

I came near taking my eyes off him. The impulse to look around was strong, unbelievably strong, though I was far from being sure there was not some one standing behind me. The ruse—if it was a ruse—was one with which I was perfectly familiar, having had occasion to use it at one time and another. It is almost invariably effective.

I slipped the two guns from my coat pocket, and leaning over, quickly pressed one against his body, while with the other cocked and pointed behind me, I turned my head.

I merely glanced backward. There was no one behind me.

I might have known there would not be, for had there been any one, Gaboreau would have been far too wise and careful to have disclosed the presence by staring over my shoulder.

He was a daring and bold fellow, and there was much deviltry to come out of him, though he sat apparently helpless in his chair; and had I more than glanced to see what was to my rear, his ruse would have been successful—except that he would certainly have paid with his life for trying to blind me with the vitriol gun that he snatched from his pocket with one hand while with the other he tried to turn aside the automatic that was at his ribs.

But with the gun in my right hand, which I had put behind me when I turned my head, I struck his wrist sharply and the wicked little nickel-plated tube, which I knew was a vitriol gun, since I had removed three of them earlier in the evening from pockets of black-bearded gentlemen, fell to the floor.

It was a desperate incident and a close call for him as well as for myself. He came near to getting shot. But I did not want to shoot. I did not want to arouse the neighborhood. I wanted to wait until Vivian was brought right into the house. I knew that I could get her out.

GABOREAU was a man of surprises. His manner changed so completely toward me that I wondered what new evil he had ready. I expected him to be furious, for he had not only failed but had received a painful crack on the wrist. He had cried out when his knees were touched—but that was pure make-believe, used for the purpose of getting me to stand away from the table with my back toward the door so that he could try the ruse of staring past my head as though at some one behind me.

He did not even have rheumatism, but worse—paralysis. His legs were withered so that he could move only with the use of his arms. That condition explained entirely why he perforce kept himself in the background and employed others to do his work. He could not do anything himself but plan and devise contrivances and plots.

But he had no sooner failed with that ruse than he began something else; and he talked with a plausibility that, while it did not for a moment seduce me, yet had in it that heady flattery which will often unbalance the most careful of men.

"Everhard," he said in a matter-of-fact, straightforward tone as he looked at me, though still rubbing his wrist to ease the pain, "you've beaten me. I'm through. You win. I never thought that man lived who could do it. You wouldn't have done it either if I had handled the affair of that girl instead of letting that empty-headed, blatant fool of a Frank De Meyervelt 'engineer,' as he called it, his private theatricals. You tripped him up and caught on to me.

"You're a gambler. You've called me and I have nothing to show. My cards are on the table—but you don't even need

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to show your hand. You have brains. You have nerve. How you got on to me, how you got in here to me, I don't know. You don't need to tell me. You are the man I want. I hold no grudge. You can have anything on earth you want. I can get it. I can get anything from the Kaiser's crown to the prettiest woman this side of hell. That's where the pretty ones go when they die. I can get anything, Everhard, but brainy, nervy men. I want you.

"I've taken years training Charles and Felix and Robert and George—and they're bunglers. They can't think. I'd give the lot of them for you, Everhard. I mean it. They let me bully them and nag them—they know they are helpless without me. Give them a new pair of suspenders and they'd have to come to me to ask how to put them on. But I want you. If I had beaten you I wouldn't care a —— for you. That's straight. But you beat me. Name your price."

I expected to get Vivian without having to "name" her as a price. But I was playing for time, and also I was studying just how I could manipulate this fellow so as to get evidence that would put his black-beards behind the bars permanently. And I wanted to make no bargain with him—chiefly because I stick to my bargains and I did not expect that he would. But I asked, with what curiosity I could indicate in my voice:

"Just what is the nature of the work you would expect of me?"

"You and I work together and we'll do anything you want. You suggest it. I'll plan it. We'll make those fools carry it out. If anybody's caught—" he chuckled with glee—"they get hanged. Not me. Not you. Listen; Felix and Robert and Charles and George know that tomorrow I could send every one of them to the chair. That's why—" he chuckled again—"they're so faithful! That and the money they get out of me."

He paused, and I took the chance to remark that what he had just said did not appear entirely credible. I pointed out that some one of these men was alone with him every night, and that I failed to see why at some time or other they might not set fire to the house or hit him over the head if they desired to be free of him and his dangerous evidence.

"You know some one comes, do you?" he asked queerly, looking at me as though to see if I had made a lucky guess or spoke from certain knowledge. "And you sit here waiting for him? —— me, but you have nerve. A man after my own heart. And it's like you to think of that, too. Murder me and burn the house. You think of everything!

"It would be easy, too. I lied to you a while ago. I haven't rheumatism. I'm paralyzed. Helpless. But those whelps are afraid of me. They dare not raise a hand. See these record cases? They are mostly full. But I have other records too. They know I have. I make them out in detail every day, and at the end of the month I send four sets of records to four safe-deposit vaults. And Robert and Charles and Felix and George know it. I make sure that they know everything that is good for their souls!

"And they know that a friend of mine calls me up every day, but they don't know who he is. No. They would like to. And they know that when the day comes that I don't answer that friend the police will be notified by my friend of the evidence in the safe-deposit vaults. See? You are cunning and you guess the weak spot in my organization. But I am showing you that there is no weak spot. My friend is wise. I keep him well informed. He knows which man comes to me each night—and the next morning if I do not answer the telephone the police will be notified of the particular deposit vault in which the evidence against the man who was with me the night before is kept."

He told me that gleefully, proudly. It was interesting. I would have given much to know the name of that friend who was warder over the incriminating evidence against the black-beards. But I saw no way of getting it.

"Listen, Everhard," he went on. "Here is a book—" he started to open the drawer of his desk, but I stopped him.

"Not so fast, not so fast. I don't know that there is a book inside. Anybody who visits nightly with a desperate confederate that may wish to crack him over the head is likely to have more ruses than merely glancing past a man's shoulder or evidence in a safe-deposit vault that is not to be used until you are dead."

"Oh, you mistrust me!" he cried reproachfully. "Open the drawer yourself. In the

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left-hand corner you will find a book—it is marked 'Private.' I want you to see it. Look into it. Then you will understand me. You will know me better. Ah, then you will know why I am not afraid to be alone with cowards—a poor, helpless cripple, but not afraid of cowards."

I am a cautious person, a very cautious person indeed—but none too cautious for the good of my health. I dislike running the risk of being caught dozing, so there are times when I take elaborate precautions that probably seem ridiculous to more bold fellows who rush in—and are usually carried out on stretchers.

However, I was interested to see any book that Antoine Gaboreau would have as "Private." It could not be unimportant.

So I made sure that he was really paralyzed from the waist down and could not rise out of his chair unless some support was near for both his hands. Then I moved his chair back almost into the middle of the room so that he could not get his hands on anything. I searched his pockets carefully and found nothing dangerous. He endured it cheerfully. But his cheerfulness did not reassure me in the least. I very cautiously made sure that he could not trouble me during the time it would take to open the drawer and remove a book.

But I did not open the drawer by the knob. No. It might, for all I knew, have been charged with enough current to kill an elephant and have released the current when the drawer was pulled. I opened it by putting my fingers against the bottom of the drawer and pushing it out.

Nothing happened. I looked among some papers and clippings, noticed a pack of cards, and readily found what appeared to be an ordinary diary marked "Private."

I laid it on the desk.

"Sit there in the chair and read it. Go on, sit down."

There were only two chairs in the room; the one he was in and the other at the end of the table. I took hold of the back of the chair which he indicated and started to move it so that I might sit down closer to him. But it would not move. I gave it a quick pull, but its legs were fastened to the floor.

I pretended not to notice that. I let him think that I had merely changed my mind about sitting in it and said that "This will do," as I sat down on the edge of the table.

Why it was fastened to the floor I did not know. I did not see how anything was to be gained by investigating as long as I had no intention of using it. I was not curious, or at least that curious. I was suspicious of Gaboreau and expected all manner of villainy from him.

The chair appeared to be all right, but poisoned needles can be concealed beneath leather bottoms. Also, trap-doors can be concealed beneath chairs that are stationary.

I don't think that he saw I had been made suspicious. I did not struggle with the chair to see how much force it would resist before being moved. I did not look at him accusingly or suspiciously. I merely half sat and half leaned against the corner of the table and glanced down at the diary and then at him.

"GO ON, read the book. Open it. I want you to see," he said eagerly, watching me anxiously.

I looked long and hard at him before I touched the book. I was suspicious. There was, I felt, something wrong. I tried to make out what it was. I know there are times when I am overwary, ridiculously alert and untrusting. But there was a time when I was not. Commerce and intercourse with my fellow men have trained me in wariness as the jungle perils train the wily Malay to read a warning in a crushed twig.

"Go on," he insisted. "Then you will understand everything. Read the book."

I did not pick the book up. I let it lie. But reaching forward, I opened the cover. The first page was blank.

I started to turn it over and the page stuck slightly.

I raised my finger to my lips, as one naturally does when a page sticks, and wet it.

The page then turned. The other side was blank also. There was nothing to see. Not a mark.

I looked at him dubiously, wondering if it appealed to his sense of humor to offer blank pages as a diary record.

"Go on," he said excitedly. "Turn on—turn on. You'll find something."

I looked at him silently for some seconds. His face was bright with intensity. His

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eyes gleamed and he held the arms of his chair like a man struggling to keep calm. I stared hard into that fierce, sardonic face and I knew very well that I was being put to some kind of a test, through some ordeal, but I could not imagine what.

"Go on," he repeated. "It begins on the next page. I want you to see. Go on. Go on." He spoke excitedly in sharp staccato phrases.

I looked down at the blank page and started to turn it. It also stuck.

Again I raised my finger toward my lips —but stopped within three inches of my mouth.

On the end of the finger that had been dampened were a few specks of white powder. They had stuck to the moistened tip. A second later and I would have carried the poison to my mouth.

I dropped my hand to the table, took out a handkerchief with my other hand, wiped the finger carefully and then threw the handkerchief to the floor.

But I said nothing. I merely shoved the book, slowly, until it fell off the table, and all the while I stared at him. As the book fell to the floor he sank back wearily, muttering:

"—— you! —— you!" over and over.

But he did not take his eyes off me. Those eyes of his seemed lidless, unwinking, like the eyes of a serpent, peering steadily. Presently he said, speaking in the manner of one who is tired and has lost hope:

"You've beaten me. I'm not playing this time. I tried to catch you. But you beat me, Everhard. You beat me every time. If you'd moved your finger three inches more I'd have had you. An old trick, that. Two thousand years old. It was luck that saved you. You're lucky. Thank the devil for it. I'm beaten, Everhard. Sit down now and tell me what you want. I'm an old, withered, legless man. I've had to fight that way all my life. Sit down and I will tell you my story. Sit down."

"All right," I said, getting off the table. "I will sit down."

I took my time about moving and I watched him closely. But he continued to talk wearily, as though he were worn out and wished to have over whatever my business was with him—as though he had ceased to care what happened.

When he was like that I knew he was at his most dangerous. So instead of sitting down at once, or instead of carefully inspecting the chair, I lifted a heavy dictionary from its rack and without a word to him I carried it to the end of the table, and holding the book as high as I could above my head, I let it fall straight into the chair bottom so that it would hit with an impact certainly as great as the weight of a man sitting down.

Straight from the ceiling a bolt of lead dropped, hitting the book squarely with a dull, wicked thud. It would have crushed through the head of an ox.

At once I tumbled the lead weight and the book out of the chair to the floor and sat down.

I know that I did it with no appearance of excitement, for I felt none. I was sure no lead bolt would strike twice in the same place. And I knew that the chair was over no trap-door. I do not remember, but I do not think that I so much as glanced upward at the ceiling. I knew where the bolt came from, so there was no reason to gape upward. Nor did I inspect the chair to see by what apparently invisible mechanism the death-trap was controlled. The reason for its being fastened into place was explained, and that was what I had used the dictionary to find out.

Gaboreau's rôle of weariness had gone. He was through with acting, with his flattery, with his weariness. What other contraptions he might have around him I could not fancy. I could do nothing more than be cautious. I did not think there were many more, if any.

But I understood how that fiercely cunning mind, imprisoned in a withered cripple's body must have found exercise in planning and devising ingenious traps that he probably never expected to use, but which gave a certain stimulating pleasure to him by their creation, and a satisfaction in having them at hand where he could contemplate them. But then, he might really have been fearful that some day somebody would get to him and give him cause to wish for his contrivances.

He had become like a crazy man. In fact, I have not the slightest doubt that he was a maniac, physically helpless, but terrible in his diabolic mentality. He must have cursed me in many foreign tongues as well as in the one that I understand most readily. And too, I understand enough

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French to know that he used more than the native tongue of his ancestors, if it were not his own, to heap execrations upon my head. Fortunately, curses never killed anybody.

Instead of trying to quiet him, I added explosive to the flame. I was thinking of my three captive black-beards. I wanted evidence that would make them prefer to be in prison than to be at large busily engaged in thinking up ways and means of bothering me. If I could make Gaboreau angry at them he might give me the information I needed.

I knew that the black-beards who visited him nightly must have been well aware of the danger of the chair. So I said—I wasn't telling the truth; I was far from the truth, but in the presence of a tiger one has little need for ethics—so I said, speaking easily in a matter-of-fact way:

"Felix told me about the chair—but evidently he didn't know about the diary. Or forgot it——"

If Gaboreau had had legs he would undoubtedly have leaped across the room at my throat. He squirmed about in the chair and beat his breast and head like a madman.

What I had said would have probably occurred to any man in my situation. I wanted to make Gaboreau suspicious of his captains. I wanted him to feel that they were traitors. I believed that they were sufficiently afraid of him to prefer prison to liberty with the chance of him striking at them. I by no means intended that he, too, should remain at liberty. Not much. But I hoped to keep Gaboreau and his black-beards separated so they could not possibly come to an explanation.

Explanations between them would leave me in the anxious seat. And as I have said, I guessed that Felix, and the others too, must have known of the chair. But the diary—that was hidden away. There was no need for Gaboreau to share its secret with any one; and possibly he had it in store against the day when some of his black-beards would no longer be useful to him.

Anyway, Gaboreau fell into my trap as a blind man falls over a precipice. The one horror and fear of his life seems to have been treachery from his captains. He was so helpless that loyalty on their part was the only legs his plans had to move about on. And naturally, as it was the most important thing in the world to him, it was the one thing upon which his suspicions fastened without much encouragement. The man who sets pride before everything is always feeling that his "honor" has been offended; the jealous man is always quick to be suspicious of his wife; and Gaboreau, being fearful for the loyalty which his captains owed to him, needed nothing more than a little shove from me to plunge into the conviction that Felix, and the others too before I had finished with him, were traitors. He thought of evidence to prove it.

"You bought Felix!" he screamed at me. "Traitor!——" and another storm of unprintable abuse was upon me. "You hired him to carry off the wrong girl! You paid him to leave the Oriel that night! It was from him you got my telephone! Now I see—now I know—ah, he told you which of the steps was wired so that an alarm would ring! He gave you the key to my house! The traitor! Wretch——" and more abuse.

It was splendid from my point of view. But his imagination was getting much the best of him. I may be in what some people consider are comfortable circumstances, but I am hardly one fitted to bid against the loot that Gaboreau must have given his captains. Nor am I by inclination one to buy men. However, it did not seem the opportune time or place to explain all that to Gaboreau. He was going ahead and thinking up and believing evidence that had not suggested itself to me. But then, as he had said, I must have been born lucky.

"Oh, for that matter," I said easily, "why put all the blame on Felix. Not only Felix, but Charles and George as well were my guests this evening."

"You lie! You lie!"

He was convulsed with horror at the thought. He more than half believed me, but he was trying to convince himself that it was not so, that it could not be so.

"Indeed?" I answered. "In view of certain considerations they gave me little personal papers which may not interest you, but which will surely convince you that our relations have been intimate. You told me yourself that you were suspicious of them, and evidently you had good reason to be. As nearly as I can make out, they seemed rather dissatisfied because you

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never take them into your confidence. You simply give orders—and they are expected to carry them out. I gathered that they think the three of them together are competent to plan as well as you. They seem to think there is no longer need to serve a man who can not take any of the dangers—but gets all the profits!"

He listened to me fascinated by belief. He had himself given me practically all the information I had conveyed back to him as evidence of my familiarity with his black-beards. He recognized it, not as his own information, but as information that agreed with his own suspicions. And when I had finished he cried:

"That is right! That is just like them! The traitors—cowards—miserable, ——thieves——" and other things more vicious that can not be repeated.

While he raved and raged, I took from my pocket the papers I had collected during the evening from the black-beards, glanced through them to make sure that I was not handing away anything unread that might be important, then selected some papers that seemed to carry notations of instructions which he had given each of the men, and handed them to him.

FOR a time I thought he would faint from sheer weakness of rage. When he had read what I had given him there was no doubt in his mind that three of his most trusted men were traitors.

In the first place, he was in no condition to reason clearly and shrewdly. And in the next place, he no doubt thought it a physical impossibility—even if the idea of my having done so occurred to him—that I could have taken all three of his valiant, resourceful and tried captains as my prisoners. Into his crazy, yet powerful brain, the belief stuck like a poisoned arrow; his men had betrayed him.

He swore by the gods of heaven and the unnumbered demons below the earth that he would be revenged, that they should pay to the last drop of their blood for their treachery.

He ignored me completely. At least all bitterness, or feeling whatever toward me seemed to have left him—anyway for the time. A more important issue had been brought in.

He raised his hands above his head and swore vengeance. He pounded the arms of his chair and swore it. He cursed till I thought the man would surely drain the last bit of strength from his weak body. It was hideous.

I was for the time mystified that he, so helpless in body, had surrounded himself with deaf servants. He was a cripple, yet he did not use a wheel chair. He was unable to walk, yet no one appeared to assist him. I had more or less expected somebody to show up all the while I was in the room. And when they did I expected to take care of them. I am not what might be called an extremely nervous person. I knew that according to the police there was supposed to be a cook and a maid and an old man. The old man was evidently Gaboreau himself; whom the police detectives had seen before the window.

As I have said, how Gaboreau got about I could not imagine. Nor for all of his loud shouting were there any servants. I found out almost at once how he got about, and I found out afterward that his two servants were truly deaf, and that he wanted nobody around who could listen to his instructions and conversations over the phone, and he preferred to wait on himself as best he could by crawling about on the floor.

He suddenly scrambled out of his chair and like a monstrous crab started across the floor to me. He moved with surprising quickness, dragging his thin, lifeless legs like a man with his back broken—a pitiful object, yet fierce; maimed but venomous.

"They are mine!" he screamed at me, and I did not know of what he was talking. But I learned at once. "You've got all you want out of them. Traitors! They belong to me. I will settle with them! I will drink a glass of blood from each of their bodies!"

"You will not!" I said.

I almost shuddered at the horribleness of him and his words. It was frightfully repugnant.

"I will. You must give them to me or I will kill you. I will kill *you!*"

That is an excellent way to make me stubborn. I stood up and moved so as to bar his way. I did not know where he was going or what he was after, but he seemed determined to reach the table.

A wild light of cunning appeared in his eyes. He was crazy, crazy as a wounded cat; but his brain was not dull.

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His hand shot up past me and began clawing toward the knob of the drawer. At least I thought he was reaching for the knob. But I reached down and enclosed his small, fragile hand in my fingers.

I had not carefully examined the contents of the drawer when I opened it to take out the poisoned diary and I had no intention of standing there and letting him find what he thought might be useful to him. He was too diabolically clever for the comfort of any man who had offended him, and I did not care for further experiments with his ingenuity.

He tugged at my hand, but I held fast. From the way he talked and the way he acted I was sure there was not a sane cell in his brain—a big brain, too; much too large for even a perfect body with no larger a frame than his.

"Take your hand away. Let go! Let go!" he screamed—and I removed my hand swiftly, not at his urgency or because of his strength, but because he had put his mouth against my hand as though to bite. He looked toothless and perhaps he was. But I did not hold my hand there to see. I felt then and I feel now that I would as soon be bitten by a viper. As I released his hand he again reached forward toward the knob. At least I thought it was toward the knob. But I struck his arm up.

"What do you want?" I asked.

He hesitated. For an instant I do not believe he knew what to say. No doubt he did some rapid thinking in that instant. He saw I had rebuffed and evaded him at every point, but he was as full of cunning as a cobra of poison. He knew I was a gambler; and he looked calculatingly into my face as he replied:

"I want the cards — they are in the drawer. Let me get them."

Again he reached toward the table, and again I pushed his hand away.

"What do you want them for?" I asked.

An inspiration seemed to come to him, for he shouted excitedly at me:

"We will play to see who wins!"

"Wins what?" I asked. I did not know of what he was talking, but he seemed to know perfectly.

"Let me have the cards. Open the drawer—open it."

"You move back a few inches and I will," I told him.

He seemed reluctant, but he moved back. I opened the drawer and searched to make sure there was nothing in the shape of a weapon there. Then I tossed the cards to the floor beside him.

Before I knew what he was about he had snatched the drawer clear from the table so that it fell almost on top of him, and spilled everything. He quickly flopped the drawer over and put the cards on its bottom for a table.

I still stood between him and the table and watched him, wondering what he was up to. Perhaps he had suggested some kind of a card game to kill time until Robert and De Meyervelt could arrive with Vivian and help him make me prisoner. I, too, wanted to kill time, but I did not propose to do it merely as a pastime.

"What are we to play for?" I asked again.

"Sit down. Sit down and I will tell you, Everhard. It will be well worth your while. It will be the biggest stake you ever played for—and you are a gambler—a big gambler. I have heard of you. Sit down and I will tell you. Sit down."

He had urged me before to sit down—and have my head crushed with a bolt of lead. I wondered what deviltry was back of this solicitation.

"All right," I said, and again perched myself on the edge of the table.

"No, no. Here on the floor. In front of me—we will play. Sit down and I will explain."

He was a lunatic, undoubtedly. There was no reason that I could see why I should sit down on the floor and play cards with him. There was nothing to play for. I might have made the stakes his liberty against evidence enough to convict the black-beards I had in my apartment. But that would have been like playing coon-can with the devil himself to see whether I should have him at my heels or some of his imps. He would probably enough refuse to give me the evidence if I won, and it would be much easier and more sensible to strike an open bargain rather than fool around with a card game.

Those three black-beards were on my mind. I expected to get rid of them in some way that suited me. He had sworn vengeance against them, and no doubt if given the opportunity would make short work of his vengeance. If I were any judge of men, I knew that they would make it

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a part of their life's work to even up the score with me if they got liberty. But this fierce old lunatic considered them traitors and all he asked for was a chance to murder them.

But I could not countenance any such murder. If the black-beards had really been traitors it is possible that I might have shut my eyes and let him strike at them. Yet I did not intend to waste my time making their lives the stake of a game of poker. If he promised to let them off in case I won, I was satisfied that he would not keep the promise. Anyway, there was no reason to play. I did not know what he had in mind, but I told him there was no reason to play.

"But there is! There is!" he insisted. "Sit down and I will explain. Such stakes as were never played for in all the world—sit down!"

He was crazy.

I wanted evidence against the black-beards, but I did not dare let him suspect that I wanted it. It might lead him to think that after all my relations with them was not so agreeable as he believed. But it was nonsense for him to talk about playing for "such stakes as were never played for in all the world."

HE CONTINUED to urge me to sit down even as he shuffled and shuffled the cards, and he did it with nimble fingers. No doubt he had found solitaire a comfort for him in his loneliness. He was at least thoroughly familiar with cards.

"I will tell you what I will do, Gaboreau," I said at length, determined to get the most I could out of the card game without having to depend on the so-called stakes for it. "Felix and Charles and George are waiting for me to return. They have some doubts as to whether or not I could get in here to you in spite of all the assistance they gave me. Now if you will write out a little note to them—something—anything—tell them you are going to cut their hearts out—anything, I don't care—so I can show them that I really reached you, well then if you give it to me, I will play a couple of hands with you."

There is something in human nature that urges men to make a threat, a violent threat when they are about to wreak vengeance. Why it is I can not understand. It is like the rattle of a snake before it leaps, the growl of a dog before it bites, the spit of a cat before it springs. Many men, most men, feel there is no satisfaction in killing an enemy without having warned that enemy. Perhaps they want the enemy to suffer from fear of being stricken down. I do not know.

I suggested some such violent threat to Gaboreau, expecting that he would write it for me. I did not intend to sit down and play unless he did. I did not know but that perhaps he would be glad to have them warned—but I did not know that he did not expect me to deliver it. He did not expect me to leave the room of my own free will. I did expect to. That was the chief difference between us.

With a written warning from Gaboreau I believed that I could so frighten those black-beards that they would be glad to seek the protective cloister of the prison to escape him, and that they would eagerly confess to enough real or imaginary crimes to get a long sentence. There would be something potent in a written death-warning that would be utterly lacking in word of mouth, particularly from my mouth.

"I will give it to you," he said readily—too readily, it seemed, and started scrambling toward the table. He was but a few feet from it, but I still stood between him and the table, and stopped him.

"Never mind," I said. "Here is my pen. I'll hand you a sheet of paper and you can write on that drawer."

I handed him a sheet of paper and my fountain-pen. He wrote fiercely:

FELIX, GEORGE, CHARLES:

You miserable wretches, before forty-eight hours I will cut your hearts out and stuff them down your throats.

GABOREAU.

It was a horrible threat, and from a crazy man. None other could be so fiendishly revolting. The writing of it seemed to give him satisfaction. He handed the sheet of paper to me, together with my pen, and I put both in my pocket.

"Now," he said, his eyes agleam with excitement, "we shall play. Sit down. Sit down. You promised. Sit down."

I had promised, it is true. I have told many lies in my time, but I have never broken a promise. Probably if I had known what he was up to I might have hesitated. I would have sat down, of

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course, but I would have been a little more particular.

All of the while I had been standing between him and the table. It was scarcely more than arm's length from him. But there was no other drawer, there was no weapon of any kind in sight, and he was a weakling as well as a cripple, so I did not see much reason to be afraid of sitting down across the drawer from him. Besides, that would leave his back to the door and I could watch it as well as him. Robert and De Meyervelt would certainly be coming soon, and though I did not expect them to get into the house without my knowing it, still I thought it just as well to have the door where I could see it. I squatted on the floor opposite him, and said—

"Very well, what shall we play for?"

He fidgeted about as though settling himself. I noticed, but did not pay any particular attention to the fact that in fidgeting he had squirmed a little nearer to the table. But he did not seem to have his mind on the table. I watched him for a while, ready to seize and drag him back if his hand reached toward it.

But he began again to shuffle the cards with adroit fingers and all the while chattered nonsense about what stakes we should play for. I decided that he was certainly trying to keep me there in the room until his friends came.

"What are we to play for?" I repeated.

His manner became a little more quiet. He went on shuffling the cards as he asked—

"What is the greatest thing in the world to you?"

"I don't know exactly. The same, I suppose, as it is to most men. My life."

"Yes. That is what we will play for. Your life."

He acted as though he really believed it. A fine state of affairs indeed when he, virtually a prisoner and helpless, could dictate such terms as though he were in control of my fate. He was a lunatic and there was no mistaking it. But there was nothing crazy about the way he could handle cards.

"Your life," he repeated, continuing to shuffle the cards.

"Indeed? That is interesting."

"I knew you would think so," he said quietly, and actually smiled.

"You seem to forget," I warned him coldly, slipping my hands into my coat pockets, "that I have an automatic in either pocket, and if you know anything about me you know that I shoot straight."

"Yes, yes," he replied softly, continuing to smile. "I have heard. But you seem to forget, Monsieur Everhard, that I am Antoine Gaboreau. No man has ever beaten me. No man can. We shall play. If you win, you shall live. If you lose—"

He shrugged his shoulders. Also, he seemed to believe what he was saying. I said nothing. It was not worth answering. Then he went on, growing more excited, and said:

"It is true, Monsieur Everhard. It is true. I admire you. It may be that you do not believe me. But you are dangerous. If you live you must live as my prisoner until I am ready to let you go. But let you go I will. I promise. I mean it. You would keep your word if you promised to let me live. I know it. I will keep mine. You think I have no honor because I have lied to you. But you shall learn. I am an old man, failure means more to me than death. I am ready to die when I can no longer beat men down.

"I must beat you. I have beaten you. You think I am crazy because I ask you to gamble for your life when you have two guns in your pocket and can take from me what you want without playing for it. You think you are strong and can overpower this poor old man with the twisted legs and pipe-stem wrists. But I have let you live, Everhard, because I was not ready to die.

"Look," he cried, at the same time extending his hand up to the leg of the table.

I looked apprehensively, but I saw nothing at first; then I detected that his finger was touching an almost invisible button.

"If I press this, we go to hell together. This house is mined. Think I would keep all these records—" he indicated the filing cases with a gesture from his other hand—"and have no means of protecting them. Think I am a fool. You pulled my chair away from the table—that was not clever, because you did not know why you did it. That was luck. I tried you with the diary and with the chair. You are lucky. I had to get back to this table. I am back. This button controls a mine—and I control the button. Ha! Ha! Ha! Everhard, now do you see why we shall play?

"I admire you, Everhard. But if you

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move—we go together. You can't shoot quick enough to keep me from pressing the button, and we die together. You know I am not lying, don't you?

"See, I have my finger on this little button—see—I press down just so lightly—lightly—just so—and if you excite me I may forget myself and press harder, then—Ah, you don't squirm. You don't beg me to take my finger off. Your face is still calm—but your heart, is it not beating fast? A gambler's face—but you are afraid. You are afraid. No man could live and not be afraid. Why don't you cry out? An ounce more pressure, man, and you go to hell. Beg me to take my hand away! —— you, tremble! —— you, I will blow us both to——"

"All right. Go ahead," I said sharply.

I WANT no one to think that I spoke in a spirit of bravado. No. I was quite sure that the house was mined and I was quite sure that he was crazy. Perhaps I was afraid. Fear does not react upon me as it does upon some men. I am not excitable. But I realized with a good deal of apprehensiveness that if he continued to fumble with that button and try to frighten me he might press a bit harder than he intended. I told him to go ahead purely as a matter of a bluff. It was an easy bluff to make, because I knew that if he were ready to touch off a mine in the basement and put an end to himself as well as to me he would not be dallying around and talking about it.

I did not doubt for a moment, however, that he would hesitate between pressing that button and permitting himself to be taken prisoner. He had reasons for preferring death to failure. He was old and helpless, and if taken from that room, cut off from his associates, he would probably never again be able to get so clear of the law as to resume his criminal work. Death would be the easy way out.

But it was not a way that suited me—nor was it a way that he would choose readily. The situation was a sort of desperate draw. Neither had the upper hand, and either could carry the other to destruction, but both would have to go along. But if I had permitted him to think that I was terrified, then he would have had the upper hand. If I had been terrified—he hoped—then he would have been able to dictate almost any kind of terms. But I realized perfectly that he was no more eager to set off that mine than myself, though it did make me uncomfortable to have him fooling with the button.

He kept his finger on the button and was silent, while he looked at me.

"You are not afraid?" he asked at length and quietly.

"What has that to do with it?" I asked, taking pains to keep my voice as calm and even as I could.

He appeared not to understand.

"It is not a matter," I explained, "of which of us is the more afraid. We are both in the same boat, or more literally, both are sitting on the same bomb. One can't get off of it unless he permits the other to. And because you have your finger on that button you need not think that I am going to sit here with my hands in the air the same as if you had a gun at my head and wait for your friends to come. But if you feel that you are ready to cash in—go ahead, press the button."

Then he began again with his compliments. He spoke almost softly, persuadingly. I had come to know that he spoke that way when he had some special deviltry he wanted to try out. And I listened. But as I listened I twisted myself around slightly so that I could draw the gun from my right pocket without him seeing. I did not want to shoot, for the report would rouse the whole neighborhood. I wanted everything to be quiet and peaceable until Vivian came. But I knew very well that I could shoot and break his wrist, and that the chances were that I could do it before he pressed the button.

At that moment his wrist was the most vital spot in his body. If he were shot through the head or heart the convulsive death-throb might still force down his finger on that button. But if his wrist were broken, all muscular power would cease in his fingers. However, I did not want to shoot. It was almost sure to mean the escape of Robert and De Meyervelt with Vivian, for if they drove up and found a crowd about the house they would drive off again—and I would be left to explain to the police.

"Everhard," he was saying, "you are a brave man. The bravest man I ever met. Few men would have thought of that—that we are sitting, as you say, on the same

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bomb. And you are right, I don't want to kill you. I want you to work with me I want to prove to you that I do admire you. I can make your fortune—give you anything. But I can't let you leave this house till Felix and George and Charles pay the price. You would warn them.

"The only reason I gave you that paper warning them was because I knew you would not leave this house. You have two guns in your pocket—and if I am not mistaken you have drawn one out of your pocket over there—but you can't shoot quick enough to keep my finger from coming down on this button. You hadn't thought of that, had you? We are still sitting on the same bomb."

As he talked I heard faintly the distant hum of a motor. It grew nearer and nearer. I was confident that Robert and De Meyervelt, with Vivian, were coming.

Desperate measures had to be taken, and soon. He was watchful and careful and trying to hold my attention until help should reach him. With my left hand I reached into my trousers pocket and drew out in my closed hand, so he could not see, a small bunch of keys.

"Now, Everhard," he went on, "I am an old man. I have lived a long time. I know men. I know you can be trusted. I am going to trust you, but you must trust me first. You must put your guns down here and let me have them. Then in a day or two when I have finished with those —— wretches, I will let you go. I hold no grudge against you. I want you to work with me, but you can go free—go your own way and we will call it off."

The car had arrived before the house. I heard something lightly strike the window —something like a few grains of sand—and I knew that the watchers below behind the rose-bushes were signaling to me.

There was no time to be lost. I could not wait for Robert and De Meyervelt to enter the house. Suddenly, and myself like a crazy man, I shouted at Gaboreau:

"Look at that button—look at it."

His finger was on the button and he kept it there. But he was amazed at my voice and manner. For a moment he hesitated, and then he did glance at the button as though to see of what I was talking. That took his eyes off me.

The instant he glanced away from me, my bunch of keys fell rattling at his side. That surprised him—for a moment took his mind entirely off his button—he glanced down to see what had fallen, and on that instant I shot.

His wrist was shattered. He could not have moved a feather with any finger of that hand. He screamed in pain and baffled fury.

Across the drawer I lunged at him and straight at his throat. Mine is a slim, soft hand to look at, but I can bend a quarter between the fingers of my left hand; and Gaboreau was as near to being strangled as he ever will be until the hemp goes around his neck.

With his free hand he struck out frantically, trying to reach the button, but no seconds were lost by his weak struggles. I got to my feet, and without releasing the hold I had on his neck, I dragged him across the room to the window. I could not risk letting go for an instant, and I smashed the window with the gun in my other hand, and shouted out:

"Kelly, Guernsey—get those fellows! Get them!"

A moment of silence. I could see the motor drawn up at the curb and a man standing beside it. Then a woman's voice called out—

"Don!"

It was Vivian.

IX

WHEN I heard Vivian's voice call out to me from the shadows I raised the gun and fired at the man by the curbing. But my left hand was still at the throat of the Gaboreau whom I had jammed against the wall. But because I could not hold him up and because he could not stand, I had been forced to stoop, and he was still squirming. That was one of the things that made me miss.

Many things happened at once. The man at the curbing leaped into the machine. Two men sprang from behind the bushes by the porch and started forward. The fellow who sprang into the machine was at the wheel, and in the tonneau I could see two forms, one of them Vivian.

I flung the practically unconscious Gaboreau to the floor, and hastily beat the glass out of the window—but even as I leaped to the ground I heard the roar of the motor as the car started off.

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It was a long jump and the ground was hard. I was badly jolted, and for two or three seconds I was rather dazed. It seemed minutes of torturous inaction as I scrambled to my feet.

Guernsey and Kelly, surprised and unprepared, had lost time in darting out from the bushes; but they did not lose time after the car started off. They thought more rapidly and clearly than I. As I got to my feet I heard some one cry—

"To the garage—quick!"

But my attention was fastened on the car that was getting under way from the front of the house. I raised the gun to shoot, then dropped it because I did not dare take the chance of shooting in the moonlight against a target where the head and shoulders of three forms were blurred, and one of those was Vivian.

The car was almost out of sight—I had run out to the curbing futilely watching it sweep away—when a miracle seemed to happen.

Out of the shadows back of the house and down the driveway leading to the street, rolled a big powerful roadster, chugging mightily, not a hundred feet from me. I ran forward. Guernsey was at the wheel and Kelly was astride the gasoline tank.

As I jumped into the car it leaped forward. But I became aware of lights flashing in the windows of the houses around about us and of the excited voices of people calling to and fro. The shots had evidently alarmed the neighborhood as well as warned the men who had come with Vivian.

"Kelly remembered this car," Guernsey shouted at my ear. "We'll give a chase they won't ——" the remainder of the sentence was lost in the rush of wind and motor roar.

The ground seemed to spring from under the car and fall swiftly behind us. Far ahead of us, scarcely more than the red taillight of the fugitive car was visible.

I wondered at the time why the driver did not turn a corner and so have a better chance of shaking us off; but it was explained to me later that that machine would have had to slow down to make the turn safely and that we would have been almost on it before it could again get up speed. At least, that was Guernsey's interpretation. It may have been so. But mine is that Frank De Meyervelt, who drove, did not think of the advantage of turning a corner. And it was fortunate that he was no such driver as Guernsey.

A wild ride it was. The roar of our open muffler was deafening; and the speed that Guernsey tore out of those cylinders was something that very nearly makes me tremble to remember, though at the time I did not think of it. The road was clear and whole blocks of houses and trees seemed to sweep by in flashes as we sprang from one street light to another.

Once a figure appeared in the road and made an effort to flag us down. It was some lone policeman, evidently bent upon investigating the cause of such havoc with the speed law as the car before and our own were making. But he barely leaped out of the way in time to save himself, and the shot that he fired at our tire went wild. If he had hit that tire and caused us to stop I think he would have been regretful. I was in no mood to respect speed laws or policemen.

Straight ahead of us burned the red taillight. It seemed that for all of our furious speed we were not gaining, but distances at night are deceptive, and one can almost overtake a car in the moonlight without being aware that the distance has decreased.

Anyway, the car ahead was a powerful machine of foreign make. Guernsey screamed the name at me, but I know little about cars and care nothing about their fine points. I did, however, know enough to wonder how much gasoline was in our tank and whether it would outlast that in the car ahead. But the one we were in was evidently kept for emergencies, for all that Guernsey had had to do was to jump in and press the starter.

Straining my eyes into the moonlight and watching intently, I soon realized that we were gaining. I could begin to make out more clearly the outline of the machine. Then De Meyervelt, either because he knew where he wanted to go, or because he had at last happened to think of the advantage of turning a corner, swept to one side and out of sight.

But he was too late to win by that maneuver. A few seconds later Guernsey took the same corner, and he took it on two wheels and with a skid that carried us across the street.

I was nearly catapulted from my seat. I did not understand why such an impetus seemed to concentrate at my shoulder and

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very nearly lift me bodily from the car. But I glanced over my shoulder. Kelly was gone.

Turning the corner had unseated him, and from his perch on the gasoline tank he had made a frantic grab for the first stable thing that came to hand, and that had been my shoulder. He came nearly taking me with him. But I was thankful that he had caught at me instead of at Guernsey. We might all have been spilled then.

I was apprehensive lest Kelly had broken his neck. But there was no time to stop. Who rides at the heels of the devil can not pause to give "first aid" to those who fall by the wayside.

We drove ahead. No glass was before the seats and the wind whipped our faces with a thousand lashes. From somewhere within the depths of that roaring hood Guernsey drew a new burst of speed, and he was crouched low over the wheel, steering ahead like a man who has fused his body with the cylinders and is driving the pistons by the beat of his own heart. I looked long and carefully at his face; it was a hard thick face and set with purpose. Some day a mighty sculptor will hew a man at the wheel, and it will look like Guernsey, for nothing else will so tensely and truly show the resolution and courage of those fierce centaurs that ride the rubber-shod engines.

The pace was rapidly leading us out of the city—in what direction or where I did not pay the slightest attention. I only knew that we had passed solid rows of houses and were pounding down the scattered rows of suburban homes.

But the fleeing red light was drawing nearer. It drew so near that we were close enough to be shot at over the tonneau. That was unpleasant and unexpected. I saw a burst of light and a second later heard the crack of the automatic. Another spurt of light and then the report. The man was firing carefully and taking time.

But instead of slowing down, Guernsey recklessly drove ahead straight into the line of fire. I could see the body of the car plainly in the moonlight, but I could not see any one in it. For one thing the roadster in which we rode was low, underslung, and we were nearer the ground. But there was no one sitting up in the tonneau. I wondered whether Vivian had been knocked unconscious, for I knew that as long as she was not helpless she would fight when I was near. The man riding behind with her was evidently crouching.

I hesitated to shoot. I raised the gun and thought to aim at a tire—but even for me, who am no less expert with a gun than with cards—that was no reasonable target. Besides, I was afraid that if I hit the tire the blowout might cause the car, going at such terrific speed, to skid and probably turn over. And Vivian was in it.

The man ahead fired again and again. He was crouched so low that he offered me no target. He shot deliberately. His aim was not only bad, which meant that he was evidently a poor marksman, but the jolting of the car did not permit him to take careful aim, and he did not know how to make allowances for the jars. But as it was, he came unpleasantly close, and twice the bullets rang against metal and I held my breath waiting to see if a vital spot in the engine had been touched.

I counted nine spurts and began to think that was all. But he must have taken another gun from the man at the wheel. Anyway, he opened fire again, this time more rapidly, as though frightened into haste.

The effect of the shooting on Guernsey was just opposite to what the marksman hoped for. When the second fusillade began Guernsey swore and stepped on the accelerator. I thought he had been running at full speed, but he knew the machine better than I, and he seemed determined to close in and come to grips. It was a make he said afterward, of which he knew every bone in its body, and that they never went so fast but that they could go a little faster. But it was reckless to rush closer while, less than a block away, we were being used as a target.

And being used as a target got on my nerves. I opened fire. I did not shoot at the tire. I shot at the middle of the right-hand side of the tonneau, directly under the spot from which the spurts came. My first shot was answered. My second was not. The man in the tonneau had used but seven shells of his second gun. He had at least two more in reserve if he was in condition to use them.

We had come so close that I could have thrown a rock into the tonneau of the other car.

"Jump?" Guernsey yelled questioningly at me without taking his eyes from the road.

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I bent to his ear and said—

"Yes."

Then I put both feet on the seat under me and crouched low, perilously swaying and rocking while with one hand I held on to the back. In the other I still held the gun. And I said a bit of prayer designed to keep us from having to turn a corner while I was in that position.

We were almost beside the other car, but it seeemed that the gap would never be closed. I shouted at the man at the wheel to halt, but either he did not hear me or care to heed. Perhaps my voice was carried backward by the rush of wind. I could have shot, but that would have left his car to leap wildly to the side of the road.

Both machines were pulling at the highest notch of speed. But inch by inch, foot by foot, we crept alongside—up and up and up.

Guernsey was pulling in so closely to make my jump the easier that I was afraid he would bump the other machine. But he knew his work too well for me to try to advise him. I crouched low in the seat and waited—waited until the tonneau was fairly beside me; then I leaped.

I barely caught the back. If any one had been on watch in the tonneau I could easily have been pushed off. There were two people in it. One was bound and the other was unconscious—dead. My second shot had taken Robert, the fourth blackbeard, in the heart.

De Meyervelt was at the wheel and so intent on driving that he did not know what was going on behind him. I doubt if he knew Robert had been shot.

He knew the other car was creeping alongside, and with one hand on the wheel and his eyes on the road, he was trying to get something out of his pocket—a gun. De Meyervelt—or De Mey, for at last I had him—was afraid to look away from the road, and he was making a bad job both of driving and trying to shoot. The roar of both open mufflers, together with the wind sweeping away to the rear every sound I had made in scrambling into the tonneau, had prevented him from noticing how close I was.

The first he knew of my presence was when I poked the cold muzzle at the base of his ear and just behind his jaw-bone and, leaning over, told him to drop his gun and slow down.

"Slow down—but don't stop," I said.

He risked a glance behind him and very nearly slid from the road. But he saw enough to drop his gun and instantly put both hands on to the wheel. Then he slowed down.

Guernsey, from beside the machine, called to me. I told him to go back the way we had come and pick up Kelly.

"Take him to the hospital if you find him, and he is injured—then come to my apartment."

Guernsey never questioned and never hesitated. He turned around at once and started back.

"Take the next turn," I said to De Meyervelt, "and drive on till I tell you to turn again."

I wanted to shake off any police cyclists that might be on my trail, and then get my bearings.

VIVIAN, gagged, with her hands tied, and an ugly black welt on the side of her forehead, lay doubled up in the left-hand side of the tonneau.

No doubt it may have seemed heartless of me, but I made sure that the man on the floor of the tonneau was dead, and then searched the man at the wheel, before I gave attention to her.

I told De Meyervelt—a palpable coward—that if he wanted to get revenge by ditching the car to go ahead; but that he would not come out of the wreck alive. There was no danger of him attempting anything so courageous.

I slipped the gag from Vivian and even before I had cut the cords on her wrists, that irrepressible little woman put up her lips.

"Don, kiss me! It's been a horrible dream. I want to be awakened!"

Then I cut the cords, and she flung both arms around my neck.

"No, no," I said gently, removing one arm, "I have to watch that fellow yet a while."

"He needs watching, too," she said scornfully. "But this man"—indicating the body I had straightened out as well as I could, at the same time watchfully making sure that the man at the wheel did not reach back and crack me on the head—"was a gentleman."

I touched the bruised mark inquiringly on her forehead.

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"Yes," she said, indicating De Meyervelt, "he did it!"

"I suppose you know that this is the handsome, gallant, courageous Franklin De Mey?" I asked, speaking loud enough for the ears in front of us.

"I know," she answered, with disgust.

"And the man who caught this car," I said, pointing backward in the direction Guernsey had taken, "is the old man, Mr. Guernsey—the real estate agent from Los Angeles——"

"Don, you don't mean it? How'd he get here?"

"I invited him some days ago. And he is a *man*, my dear. Each fellow to his own work. He would probably be awkward and crude in a poker game, but at that, I expect he would make a better showing than I at the wheel. Your chauffeur there slowed down at the corner—he should have taken corners when he first started to run—but Guernsey, he is one of the kind that doesn't slow down until the race is won."

"Oh, Don," she cried, "it has been awful——"

"I know. I know pretty much what has happened," I said, stroking her forehead, which she admitted was aching from the vicious blow, "but I think you had better save your story for the inspector and for the maiden who is being watched over by Yang. Other things are being watched over by Yang, too. And this—this young man on the front seat—well, I shall have something interesting to say to him before noon. It is almost sunrise now."

THERE is not a great deal more to tell. A few little details needed to be attended to and I realized very reluctantly that I would have to call in the police. So when I had got my bearings and set De Meyervelt to driving us toward my apartment, I stopped at the first all-night drug store we came to. I did not care to leave De Meyervelt in Vivian's care, for it was very important to me that he be delivered to the inspector.

So I had Vivian telephone the inspector and ask him to have an ambulance, a detective, and to come himself as soon as he could to my apartment and wait in the office for me. I had Vivian tell him enough to interest him mightily without going into details; and she also suggested that it would be well for him to send somebody to Stillwater Place as soon as possible and apprehend an old man, paralyzed from the legs down, and to go to any extreme to do it.

The inspector did not take kindly to so many suggestions, particularly when full explanations were lacking. But he knew enough of Stillwater Place and of Gaboreau to be concerned, though he seemed from what Vivian said to have been quite peeved at being called from his warm bed at that early hour.

At the same time I had her telephone to Johnny Blix and ask him to come to the apartment as soon as he could. I owed it to Johnny to do what I could to reinstate him in the inspector's favor.

It was a longer drive back than I had expected, and took a good deal of time, for I would not let De Meyervelt speed. I did not think he had nerve enough to do anything desperate, but I did not want to give him a chance to ditch the car. A bold man in his position would not have hesitated a minute. He would have had as good a chance as I to escape; and all that a bold man ever asks for is an even break.

When we reached the apartment an impatient and suspicious inspector, the ambulance and a detective, were waiting.

The body of Robert was turned over to the ambulance, and I gave De Meyervelt into the keeping of the plain-clothes man, telling him it had been a long time since he had had so important a prisoner.

My situation was by no means comfortable. The inspector was suspicious of me and rudely insistent on an explanation as quick as I could make it. He even went so far as to put his hand on my shoulder and begin to tell me that I was under arrest.

I gently removed his hand and told him that the apartment-house office was no place to make a scene. I told it to him quietly, so that his pride would not be hurt before the detective who had taken charge of De Meyervelt; but I told it to him in such a way that he saw I was in earnest. I told him also that he would do well to suspend judgment for a few minutes and to allow me to do the explaining in my own way, and assured him that before I had finished he would be very glad.

I assured him also that it was only because he was a friend of Johnny Blix's and had treated me so courteously during the

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afternoon—he did not catch the sarcasm at all—that I had chosen him as the officer to whom I should turn over the murderer of millionaire Kingston, and that he would not have to share the reward money offered by the Kingston heirs with any one.

It was remarkable how surprised, interested and appeased he became at once. I am sure that he did not fully believe me, but he was ready to be convinced and really became quite patient.

I led the way up to my apartment and threw open the door. The inspector stepped in first and then shrank back, whipping out a gun. He thought he had been trapped, for Yang rose from the floor before him, and the long knife was held ready to strike.

"Merely a friend of mine, Inspector," I hastened to explain, "who has been detaining a few men I believe you will be glad to see."

"—— funny way of doing business," the inspector commented in surly, suspicious tones.

I agreed with him, and led the way into the room. He hesitated, then as though ashamed at the appearance of timidity, came through the door. I pointed to the three black-beards trussed and gagged and tidily corded by the wall.

The inspector swore from amazement; Vivian gave a little cry and looked at me inquiringly; but it was De Meyervelt whom I watched. He blinked as though struggling with a nightmare, then sort of crumpled in and dropped his jaw and shook about the knees. He had no doubt pegged all of his hopes on being released to those black-beards, who he expected to help him and who he probably thought were quite infallible.

For a few minutes there was something of a hubbub while the inspector, Vivian, the detective and even De Meyervelt asked questions. The noise of voices brought Jessie further than the keyhole, for she flung open the door and dashed embracingly toward Vivian; then seeing her Franklin De Mey, turned to him and was about to throw her arms around his neck.

But De Meyervelt, or De Mey as he had once called himself, looked rather depressed, and the detective interposed a forbidding hand when she approached.

"Just a minute, Miss Dutton," I said, assuming the rôle of stage manager and planning to make the situation as dramatic as possible for the benefit of both her and the inspector. "Vivian has something to tell, and please keep in mind that up to a certain point the adventures that she encountered were those intended for you. You will be interested, too, Inspector. And when my wife has finished I will have something of importance to add to her story."

Vivian caught and understood a sign from me, so she told for the inspector's benefit everything that had occurred from the time I met Jessie by chance in the Oriel, and of how she had that evening used a red wig to impersonate Jessie at an appointment, and had been thrown into a closed taxi and carried off.

"There were two men in that taxi with me. They abused me frightfully, jeering and swearing and doing their best to frighten me. I was frightened, too. One held his dirty hand over my mouth to keep me from screaming, and they made me think all kinds of fearful things.

"We drove fast, but not far, and the taxi stopped in a dark alleyway. I was carried out and taken down into some kind of a miserably dark cellar.

"They put me down and one of them pointed to an old cot with a box beside it on which was a loaf of bread and a pitcher of water, and he said that I would have to sleep on that for many nights before I again saw my beloved Franklin De Mey. I was kept there for some hours. I thought it was hours, anyway. I don't know just how long.

"The men stayed with me, and they talked most of the time about Franklin De Mey, and made out that they were terribly afraid of him, and that they were delighted with themselves at having outwitted him and carried off his sweetheart.

" 'My God, but I hope he doesn't track us here,' one of them exclaimed. Then the other said as though half frightened to death, 'He's been on our trail—what if he should come.'

"I was really frightened, but I began to see that all this had the marks of a rehearsal. The men were playing parts and parts that they didn't know any too well. Then suddenly one of the men struck me and the other tried to put his arms around me. I suppose I screamed. I was both frightened and angry, and I usually scream then.

"Anyway, just at that moment a tremendous pounding began on the door, and

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a voice called out: 'You ruffians! I've found you at last. Let me in here. Let go of that girl. You devils! I'll save you, Jessie.'

"And just as he said that, this fellow" —indicating De Meyervelt—"bounded through the door. He had a gun in his hand, but he did not shoot. He began knocking the two fellows around with one hand and kicked them and swore all manner of vengeance, but he let them dash out of the door.

"Then he turned to me and said, 'Oh, Jessie—my darling!' And he started to put his arms around me, and seemed to expect that I would hasten to embrace him. But I laughed. I simply couldn't help it. The stage-play had been so amateurish. It wouldn't have fooled a country girl.

"Then he had a good look at me and saw that he had been fooled. My red wig was very nearly off, and I know that I showed on my face that I saw clearly through the scheme to make himself a hero. He began to swear in earnest at me, and to demand that I tell him how I got there and where Jessie Dutton was. I told him nothing—then he hit me"—and Vivian turned toward Jessie and touched the black bruise on her forehead.

"He tried to make me think that he thought I had been one of a gang that kidnaped Jessie, but I knew that he did not think anything of the kind. But I would not talk to him. He could not make me say one word. I wasn't afraid—not the least bit. I wanted to kill him, but he wasn't enough of a man to be talked to—even to be made fun of.

"When he saw that I would not tell him anything, he went to the door and called; and the same two fellows that he had pretended to defend me from came in. He abused them in earnest, and told them they were all kinds of fools and I don't know what all else. He forgot all about his pose as a rescuing hero, and ended up by having those same two men stay there and watch me while he went out.

"They looked pretty much ashamed of themselves, and one really tried to apologize by explaining that they had mistaken me for somebody else. I don't know what he thought that explained. They seemed to think that they were going to have something dreadful done to them for having failed to get the right girl, and they mentioned a 'Felix' over and over again, and seemed to wonder what Felix would say and do about it. I asked them why they didn't leave me and get away if they knew they were going to get into trouble, but they said that would not do any good, that Gaboreau could catch them no matter where they went. 'If we hid in China, he'd get us,' one of them said.

"They kept me in that cellar almost all night, then he—" again indicating De Meyervelt—"came back with a black-bearded man who I thought was the same one that had followed Jessie into the Oriel that evening when Don met her. But I soon saw from the way he talked that he wasn't the one—though he looked just like the man Jessie had described. He was surprised that the one called 'Felix' could not be found, and asked him—" again indicating De Meyervelt—"if he had tried such and such places and such and such other places.

"When he saw this mark on my forehead he asked me how I got it. I told him that he had better ask his friend. The black-bearded man was angry and told this fellow what he thought of him for striking a woman. But he—" again indicating De Meyervelt—"lied and said that he had not done it at all. I didn't say anything more. There was no use. Then they left me again, for a while, and when they returned they tied my hands and feet, put a gag in my mouth, and carried me out to an automobile. While we were on the way he took the gag out and tried to question me again, but I would not say anything. We drove and drove until we came to a house away out in the residence district.

"He—" again indicating De Meyervelt—"had just got out of the machine and the other man had started to untie my feet when we heard a shot in the house. The two men with me exclaimed something and stared at the house as though they didn't know what to do. Almost at once I heard a window being smashed, and looking up, I saw Don. He said something—I didn't catch it—but I called out to him.

"The black-bearded man said, 'Quick, get away from here,' put his hand over my mouth and then jammed the gag back, while the machine started off.

"He threw me down on the cushion and I could not see or do anything, but pretty soon I heard him swear and say, 'They're coming—got that roadster from the garage.'

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Then I was not frightened any more. I knew Don was coming. But I wondered who was with him, for I knew that he could not drive a car.

"In a little while the man crouched down in the tonneau and began shooting; then I was frightened again. But as long as he kept on shooting I knew that he hadn't stopped the machine in which Don was coming. He used all of his shells and asked him—" again indicating De Meyervelt—"for a clip. Then he began to shoot again. I heard a shot fired back. Then another, then the man gave a kind of a muffled cry like he was tired, and he fell off the seat down to the floor of the machine.

"The next thing was when I looked up, and though the machine had not slowed down the least bit, there was Don scrambling up over the back of the tonneau.

JOHNNY BLIX and Guernsey had both come into the room while Vivian was talking.

"Just a minute," I said when the inspector started to question me. "I shall answer any and all questions gladly. But first I want to explain that this man, Frank De Meyervelt, alias De Mey, is the murderer of Kingston. You know why he shot him. His uncle leased Kingston's house. The real Gaboreau planned it, and——"

De Meyervelt was gasping hoarsely and trying frantically to talk. He was yellow clear through, and was desperately trying to make the inspector believe that Gaboreau was entirely to blame, though he admitted that he killed the millionaire. But Gaboreau, he said, drove him to it.

It was a wretched spectacle—the half-crazed youth begging to be let go and promising to reform, when he was in the same breath pleading guilty to the foulest kind of a murder. The inspector was bewildered and elated. He was elated at having the murderer of Kingston, but so many Gaboreaus and such complications rather befuddled him for a few minutes.

I took him aside and said that details would be forthcoming in a few minutes, but I thought it well for him to call up his office and find out whether or not the real Gaboreau—the old man with the withered legs—had been caught. He went downstairs to use the office telephone so that the three black-beards still lying by the wall could not hear what was said.

I tapped Guernsey on the arm.

"She is waiting for you," I said, pointing to the girl, sobbing in Vivian's arms.

But he held back.

"Now come with me," I said, taking Guernsey firmly by the arm.

He still hesitated. He remembered too vividly how he had heard Jessie speak of him while he was playing eavesdropper, and he held back on pretense of telling me about Kelly. Kelly had fortunately not broken his neck; only a few ribs and a leg, and badly scratched his face and body. Guernsey found him by the curbing and carried him, protesting, off to the hospital. Kelly said he did not care anything for his little "bruises," and he was delighted that the other machine had been overhauled.

"When I tumbled off," he said to Guernsey, "I shouted for you not to stop. 'Go on,' I said. 'Go on. I'm all right.' And I thought maybe you heard me."

Jerry was well taken care of, and I saw to it that he got a better job than teamster when he was able to get about. But such is his sense of gratitude that he still thinks that *he* is indebted to *me*.

When Guernsey had finished telling about Kelly he had no more excuses for hanging back. I led him across the room, and said:

"Miss Dutton, here is a friend of yours. It was entirely due to his skill and courage that——"

I got no further. There was no need to go on. Guernsey was blushing like a schoolboy that had been kissed by the lady teacher, and Jessie looked up with surprise in her tear-filled eyes. Whether she had noticed before that he was in the room or not, I do not know. She looked at him and he looked at her, and then she was in his arms. I looked at Vivian and Vivian understood.

"Don Cupid," she whispered, taking hold of my arm.

When the inspector came back, he and I and Johnny went into the next room. I made Johnny a party at the conference because I wished to rather overemphasize the help he had given me, so that he would be reinstated in the inspector's good graces. And the inspector was the happiest and proudest man in the city when he left my apartment that morning. All the credit for all of the captures was his. He modestly tried to share honors with me, but I would not have it that way. Of course, my name

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had to be mentioned, but it was to be given out that I had worked under him.

The news he had brought back from over the telephone also added another dramatic feature to the situation. The house at 22 Stillwater Place, even while people and one or two policemen had gathered, having been attracted by the shooting, suddenly burst into flames. Before the fire department could get there, a terrific explosion occurred that seemed to lift the house from its foundations and scattered the burning timbers in all directions. Nothing had been seen of an old man with withered legs or of the two servants.

"He's done for," the inspector said with a kind of official finality.

"For my part," I added, "I have irrepressible doubts about that old tiger being burned up in that fire. I have the best reasons probably of any man in the world for hoping so, but I have seen too much of his cunning and resourcefulness to be very hopeful. But I am quite sure that there was evidence in that house that he wished to have destroyed before the police arrived. That accounts for the fire."

Then I told of my experience with him, and many times as I talked the inspector whistled in astonishment at such ingenuity and cunning as Gaboreau had displayed.

I explained in full the significance of the written warning I had secured and what I hoped to do with it. The inspector entered fully into my suggestions, and when we confronted Felix, Charles and George with the terrible threat Gaboreau had made against them they showed signs of agitation. They believed that the old man's vengeance was due to descend upon them because they had bungled into my trap, and Gaboreau would never forgive bungles.

They recognized the writing as his, and asked questions; but I evaded the questions and did not tell them how I came to have the threat. They knew it was authentic, they believed they understood fully why it had been made, and they did not know that there had been a fire at Stillwater Place and that Gaboreau was thought to have perished in it. They were ready to plead guilty to almost anything, and carefully encouraged by the inspector, all of them signed statements that meant at least ten years in prison.

Then they were hurried off to jail, to be kept *incommunicado* until they could be taken into court and sentenced.

As the inspector left he pressed my hand warmly and assured me that he was entirely at my disposal in the future.

"And I mean it," he added emphatically.

When he left it was well into the middle of the morning. I was tired but not sleepy. Only Yang remained in the room. Vivian had gone out, and Jessie and Guernsey had retired into the kitchen to find a cozy place where they would be entirely out of everybody's way.

"Well, Yang," I said, "I think you can slip that knife back up your sleeve and go to bed. This little affair seems to be pretty well over, and I think that tomorrow we shall begin packing for a little trip to South America or South Africa. It doesn't make much difference which, and I expect that——"

The telephone rang. It gave a vicious, sharp jingle—another and another before I reached out and took it off the desk.

"Hello," I said.

Then a voice spoke and my fingers tightened on the receiver and my eyes narrowed as though I were looking straight into the face of him who was speaking.

"Everhard?" the voice that I knew well asked.

"Yes."

"This is Antoine Gaboreau. I will get you yet." He spoke like a man who has been greatly injured.

His voice was high and trembled slightly from the intensity of restraint. Then fury getting the better of him, he shrieked into the receiver—

"—— you, Everhard, I'll cut your heart out and jam it down your throat!"

Then he hung up abruptly. He had made what seemed to be his most terrible and solemn oath.

Yang still stood before me, immobile, enigmatic, sinister. I looked at him for some time and said nothing while I thought of Gaboreau. He was a man of immense cunning and power and vengeful as an Indian. He would be heard from again and soon.

"Yang," I said as quietly as I could. "You may go to bed now, but perhaps you had better not slip that knife back up your sleeve. And the trip I just spoke of will have to be postponed. These little affairs do not seem to have been so nearly settled as I thought."

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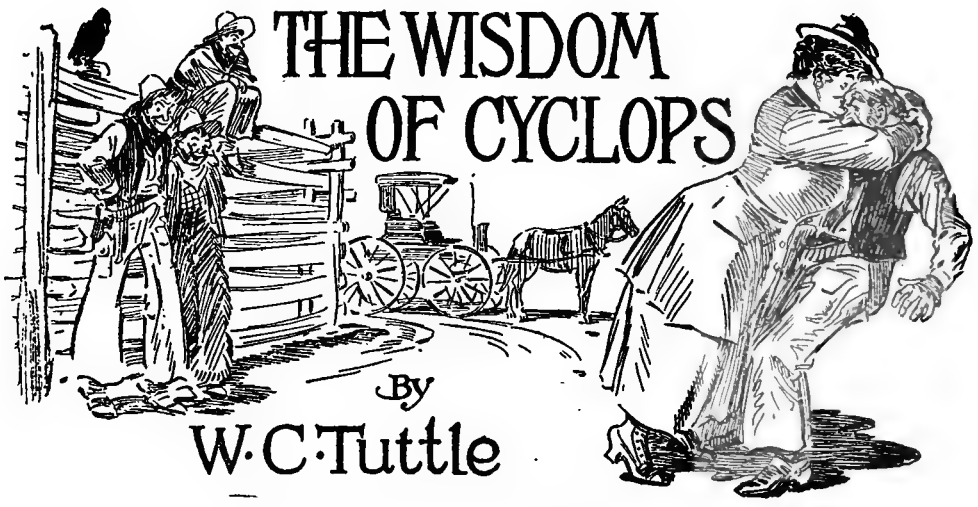

THE WISDOM OF CYCLOPS

By W. C. Tuttle

Author of "A Tin Cup Trophy," "Nerves of Iron," etc.

"DON'T yowl at me about the cooking, 'Muley,'" advises old man Whittaker, sticking his face inside the bunk-house door, and shaking his whiskers like uh billy-goat with uh peeve. "Doggone it, I know she ain't much to taste of, but 'Harelip's' all the cook I could get. You and 'Telescope' don't do nothing but kick, kick all the time. If yuh could punch cows with your voice you'd be uh pair uh humdingers."

Harelip cook, with kidneys in his feet,
Cross J ranch and nothing to eat.

Muley chants while I accompanies him on the banjo, and Telescope rings in with his tenor on the last line.

The old man snorts like uh buck deer, and slams the door.

There was as much truth as poetry in Muley's song. The cooking was the limit. When we comes to work for the Cross J they had uh Celestial being inhabiting the kitchen, and putting up pretty fair stuff, but one day Chuck Warner finds the slat-eyed hop-head asleep with his queue in the mulligan, and Hop Duck lived up to his name.

The next day comes Harelip Hansen. Harelip admits that he can cook, and the old man falls on his neck and weeps with joy.

"Zherr, I can gook," says Harelip. "Um-m-m-m good gook."

He cooked just like he talked. He put vanilla extract in the beans, baking-powder in the meat and onions in his apple pies.

"Fit for the gods," orates the old man, when he first views Harelip's pies. He takes uh bite, communes with himself, and then takes the whole stock uh pies outside and threw them in the general direction of where the gods are supposed to hang out.

Cyclops, our pet magpie, saw all that fodder going skyward, so he flits over and appropriates some of it. He pecks away and takes uh big bite, swallers hard and then comes dancing up to the house, with tears in his one eye.

"How'd yuh like it, yuh pintoed pigeon?" asks the old man.

Cyclops cocks his head on one side, and squints at the old man, with his one optic and squeaks:

"Oh ——! Oh ——!"

All of which sums up Harelip's ability as uh cook. Muley was Cyclops's tutor. He catches the magpie when it was young and unsophisticated, and opines to teach it to talk. He tries it first on English, and when it won't do nothing but make funny noises he orates uh lot of profanity to it.

"Old Testament" Tilton comes along and notifies Muley that it ain't noways Christian like to teach uh young magpie to swear.

"Teach it uh prayer," says he.

"Teach him your own self," answers Muley. "I don't know any."

Old Testament squats down in front of that bird, and starts off, solemn-like:

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"Now, I lay me down to sleep. I pray——"

The magpie ruffles up his feathers and dances up and down on the ground.

"Oh ——!" says he. "Oh ——!"

Thus ended the Bible lesson. The bird gets cocky and opines to lick uh pet coyote, with the result that he loses one eye and gains the cognomen of Cyclops.

The Cross J is some outfit. Counting Harelip as uh human being, and omitting old man Whittaker, there's five of us on the place. Muley Bowels weighs two hundred and forty, shaves twice uh week and writes poetry. Telescope Tolliver's chin is six feet above his spur rowels, and he runs strong to sentimental songs and ancestors. He states that he inherited his refined manner from the Kentucky Tollivers, uh bunch uh folks which inherited that State long before it was made illegal to distil your own hooch. He speaks of the Civil War like it happened night before last.

"You've heard uh Bull Run?" asks Chuck, one evening, when Telescope is romancing.

"Heard of it?" snorts Telescope. "Why, dang it all, my grandaddy raised the calf that they got the name from."

He hates U. S. marshals, sheriffs and diluted hooch.

Chuck Warner is uh product of some place west uh Bismarck. His face was built to wear uh hackamore, and deceive people as to his real disposition. When he gets interested in conversation he looks yuh square in the eye with uh, "Well-what-do-yuh-know-about-that?" expression, and wiggles his ears.

He's got the longest waist, shortest legs and greatest imagination of any puncher west uh Buffalo, N. Y. Sometimes he'll be going along, twinkling them short legs uh his, and with his head down, and all to once he'll stop short, stick his long nose toward the sky and break into song. He's still singing, "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean."

Chuck is very particular in one thing. If he ever told yuh the truth, and found it out, he'd never rest until he got back to you and corrected himself. He's the only liar I have met who can lie so honestly that I'll repeat his statements, and bet money they're the truth, when deep down in my soul I know he lied.

Me? I'm Hen Peck. Christened Henry Clay. I just punch cows for uh living, and try to keep out uh trouble. I ain't got nothing but brains, ability and uh banjo. I plays real well. Also, I sings uh few stanzas when properly urged, but I'm usually uh little rusty.

Just after the old man slams the door Chuck rides up and slides off his bronc.

"Got any mail for me, Chuck?" yells Muley.

"Naw. She done forgot yuh, Muley," grins Chuck. "Nothing for nobody except the old man, and our illustrious cook. I'll bet that's the first letter Harelip's got since the Custer battle."

"My cripes!" exclaims Telescope. "I hope somebody sent him uh diagram as to how to make coffee. That last cup I had, salivated my teeth. Also I'm tired uh stewed bacon and fried prunes."

"Oh, Chuck. Oh-h-h-h, Chuck!"

"The old man's yelling at yuh, Chuck," notifies Telescope, and just then the old man sticks his billy-goat chin inside the door.

"Hey, Chuck. Don't turn your bronc loose yet. I got uh gol dingle danged letter what has to be answered by telegraft, and you got to take it to Paradise."

"Hear from somebody what wants to cook?" asks Muley.

"Cook ——!" howls the old man. "I wish it was. I just got uh letter from uh gol dingle danged nephew or niece uh mine which wants to invade my premises for uh few weeks. She orates that papa wants her to come and see me. Who in —— is papa, I'd like to know?"

"If she's your niece it's an even bet that papa is either your brother or brother-in-law," opines Telescope. "Relationships runs thataway most always."

"Huh!" snorts the old man. "Maybe. Anyway, she's going to come if I don't put uh spoke in her wheel right sudden like."

"Why stop her?" asks Muley, looking at himself in our cracked mirror. "How old is she?"

"How do I know? I never saw her. Gol dingle dang it! Fine place to have uh young girl come to with Harelip cook and uh bunch uh snake-hunting punchers that don't even keep their hair cut."

"Who is she?" askes Telescope. "Don't think I'm trying to pry into your affairs, old-timer, but I'd admire to know. Can she cook?"

"I suppose I ought to know!" howls Whittaker. "She signs her name as being

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Emily Whittaker, that's all I know. Chuck, you cross between uh jackass and uh sawhorse, quit wiggling your ears, and get on that bronc. You get to the depot and telegraft her not to come. Sabe? Tell her I'm sick. Tell her any gol dingle danged thing yuh can think of, Chuck, but make it strong."

"Aw, let Hen go," argues Chuck. "I just was down ——"

"Let's both go," says I. "I got uh million-dollar thirst, and eight dollars. What do yuh say, eh?"

"Why argue when there's eight good reasons against yuh?" grins Chuck. "Get your bronc and come uh running. I'll send uh message that'll stop that female niece so quick she'll think she's paralyzed."

"Don't wire no cuss words," warns the old man. "Be pleasant but firm. Sabe?"

MIKE PELLY says *klahowya*, so we drapes over his bar and argues religion, politics and the proper way to bulldog uh steer. After several hours of pro and con—mostly con—I sudden like realizes what we came down-town for. I notifies Chuck of my discovery, and we goes up to the depot. We tells the feller in there that we wishes to send uh telegram to stop uh female. He applauds our efforts to keep the female gender off the range, and asks the name and address of the misguided person.

"There!" says I. "Ain't it queer we can't remember. You think hard, Chuck."

Chuck looks at me, wondering like, and wiggles his ears.

"Who to and where?" askes the telegraft person. "Where yuh sending this here block signal?"

"What places yuh got?" asks Chuck.

"I've got to have the name of the person and her address, or I can't do uh thing for yuh," says he.

"Can yuh send uh message to the president of your railroad?" asks Chuck.

"I sure can," says he.

"Well," says Chuck, hauling me out of reach, "You send him one like this: 'Dear Sir—Please send uh man with uh little brains down here to take my job. I don't know nothing.'

"Why didn't that old pelican of uh Whittaker tell us where to send it," complains Chuck, while we're riding home. "He just said for us to send it, that's all."

"Some folks never seem to have any sabe uh tall," I agrees. "We'll tell him we sent it, anyway."

The old man met us as we rides in, and we grins at him.

"How much was it, Chuck?" he asks, and Chuck wiggles his ears.

"Seven dollars."

"What did yuh send—uh Congressional Record?" he grunts, peeling some bills off his roll. "What'd yuh tell her, Chuck?"

"I told her that you had the hoof and mouth disease, and that the Piegans were on the war-path and that the cows had rabies, and ——"

"Chuck," says the old man, sort uh reproving like, "why didn't yuh crate the critter and ship it to her alive. No use trying to throw it over the wire."

"You can't figger that talk is cheap when you're sending an emergency brake by wire," states Chuck, hurt like, but the old man pats him on the back.

"I ain't kicking, Chuck," says he. "It's worth more than that. Gol dingle danged, if I wouldn't pay twice that to keep females off the Cross J."

"Too bad we didn't know them sentiments before, Hen," says Chuck, after the old man goes away. "That'd been seven apiece."

The next morning the old man comes down to the bunk-house, and he's some sore. He kicks my banjo off the bunk and slams things around some promiscuous.

"Hot-cakes!" announces Telescope, in uh hoarse whisper. "I've seen 'em act thataway before. There ain't no hopes for uh feller when he gets hot-cake fits."

"Hot-cakes, your grandmother!" snorts Chuck. "That's gunnysackitis. I thought there was something the matter with that coffee. Hot-cakes causes melancholy."

"Salt in the coffee, sugar in the stew, coal-oil in the bacon, and the butter's full uh glue," chants Muley, bouncing up and down on his bunk.

"Shut up, you blasted Honyocks!" yelps the old man. "Think you're plenty smart, don't yuh. Our cook has quit."

"Aw, we thank yuh," squeaks Telescope. "Do you mean to set there and tell us that Harelip has went?"

"Uh-huh," agrees the old man. "Dang his hide! Now what are we going to do?"

"Live uh lot longer, that's uh cinch,"

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replies Chuck. "What reason did he give for this pleasurable moment?"

"He said he wasn't going to be hounded by no female, so he was going away where they can't find him. I told him that there wasn't going to be no females come here, and he orates something about uh letter. Did some uh you hombres tell him that uh female was coming here? You sent that telegraft, didn't yuh, Chuck?"

"Seven dollars worth," nods Chuck, puffing on his cigaret. "What you fussing about, anyway? Harelip can't cook. Ain't it better to lose uh cookless cook than to lose the services uh four expert and first-class gilt-edged punchers? Now, ain't it?"

"He said he could cook, didn't he?" retorts the old man.

"You're too prone to take uh man's word for his ability," complains Telescope.

"I think uh that every time I observes the actions uh four punchers I got on my pay-roll. I'll be gol dingle danged if one uh you can slip uh rope through uh hondo. Next time I need punchers I'll send East for 'em. Sabe?"

"Listen to this," says Muley, picking my banjo off the floor, and striking uh discord.

"Oh, I'll sing you uh song of uh Harelip cook, and of the man who loved him well. But they both got scared of uh letter that came, and the kitchen was shot to ——. Bring ba-a-a-ack, bring ba-a-a-ack, Oh, bring back my Harelip to me, to me-e-e-e."

"Muley!" yelps the old man. "I got uh danged good notion to fire you. You and your gol dingle danged poetry! You fellers think it's funny, but I don't. I got to do the cooking. I hope yuh all shrivel up and die from starvation, so I won't have to fire yuh."

He goes out and slams the door real hard.

The old man didn't have nothing on Harelip as uh cook. In fact I think that Harelip had it over him about two cups uh soda to one biscuit. We complains so loud that the old man starts wearing two guns outside his apron, and after that we praises him uh heap.

UH FEW days after Harelip leaves the old man sticks his head inside the bunk-house one morning and wakes us all up.

"Roll out, you gol dingle danged cow trailers! I got work for yuh to-day."

"Some cow got the hives?" yawns Muley.

"I want Telescope and Muley to take the light wagon, Hen and Chuck can take the heavy wagon and I'll take the buckboard."

"What yuh doing—making out your will?" asks Muley. "If it's all the same to you, I'll take uh couple uh cows for my share."

The old man ignores Muley, and goes right on.

"I got uh bill uh stuff from Great Falls, and uh car-load uh oats. You fellers roll out and hitch up. Gol dingle danged lazy Jaspers."

Me and Chuck is hitching up our rig when old Bill Meeker drives up in his buggy, and stops beside us. He's got uh female with him that will weigh on the far side of two hundred, and is as fair as the lilies in the dell. Her hair is the color of uh corn-husk cigaret paper, and her blue eyes are as big as two-bit pieces.

"Howdy, Hen," says Meeker. "I got company for yuh."

"So?" says I, foolish-like, and the lady grins plumb across her face.

"Yah," says she.

"She opines to come to the Cross J to see her uncle who is the cook," states Meeker. "She don't wau-wau United States much, but I gets that much."

"Cook," says the female, heaving her sylph-like form overboard so sudden-like that when the buggy goes back to normal, poor little Meeker has to spur his cinch to keep from getting dumped.

"Cook!" snorts Chuck. "By cripes! She looks like she could."

"Onkle," explains the lady. "Onkle be cook."

"My ——!" grunts Chuck. "That telegraft didn't connect. Ain't that queer?"

"Yah," says she, grinning some more. "Troonk."

"Maybe, but yuh don't show it," replies Chuck.

"She means that she's got uh trunk at the depot," explains Meeker.

"Bill," says I, "you better unhitch and stick around, 'cause we'll need an interpreter."

"Here comes your uncle now," says I, pointing at the old man, who is ambling our way from the house. "He's some cook."

"Yah—goot!" says she, and pilgrims straight for the old man.

He's coming along with his head down, and don't realize what happens until she

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gathers him in. It sure is something to look at. She kisses him seven times, by actual count, before he can do uh head spin and break loose, and they goes into the dust together.

I offers any part uh six bits at four to one on the lady, but there ain't no takers.

Somehow the old man breaks the hold, lights on his feet like uh cat, and gallops to uh safe distance. The female gets up some dusty and rumpled, but still smiling.

"Gol dingle dang it!" wails the old man. "What yuh trying to do?"

"Yah," grunts the lady. "I coom oop."

"You dang well know yuh did," snorts the old man. "Any time I sets my teeth in uh person's leg they usually come up uh fogging."

"You didn't bite her, did yuh?" asks Chuck, sad-like. "My gosh! Uh man must be plumb lacking in morals when he'll bite his own relatives—in the legs."

"Relatives?" wonders the old man. "Did you say relatives, Chuck?"

"That telegraft didn't get there in time," explains Chuck, picking Cyclops off the fence, and smoothing his feathers. "You can't blame me and Hen."

The lady brushes off her skirt, waddles straight for the house, and we all watches her until she's inside.

"Hen," says the old man, weary-like, "you take the buckboard and let Chuck take the wagon. I'll—I'll stay home, I reckon. Uh feller can't desert his relatives. Gol dingle dang it! I don't know just what to say. There is times when uh man can't think of the right word."

Cyclops hops up on Chuck's shoulder and ruffles his feathers and squawks:

"Oh ——! Oh ——!"

"Thanks," says the old man.

Well, we drives to Paradise. I hates uh rattling buckboard, so I takes the heavy wagon and lets Chuck have the rattler. Me and him goes over to the depot to load up the oats, while Telescope and Muley loads up at the store. We're over there, wrestling sacks uh oats when the train comes in from the East. After she leaves we sees some people over there talking to Sandy McCall, the depot agent. Pretty soon uh woman breaks out of the herd and stampedes in our direction. She ain't exactly what you'd call veal, being about fifty years old on the hoof and not overly heavy for her age.

"Looks like she didn't Winter very well," opines Chuck. "Also she walks like she'd spent uh lot uh time in uh hard pasture."

She ambles right up to us and sizes us up plentiful, while Chuck stares right back at her and wiggles his ears.

"Young man," says she, at the top of her voice, "was you sent to get us?"

"Your name Oats?" yells Chuck, without changing expression.

"Church," she yells right back.

"Name or destination?" I whoops.

"Elizabeth Church," she howls.

"Nope," says Chuck, picking his teeth with uh straw. "If you said Methodist we could help yuh, but so far as I know there ain't no Elizabethans in Paradise. Yuh might try Rimrock. Yuh never can tell what they might have down there."

"My name is Church," she howls, explaining like.

"We congratulates yuh, m'am," nods Chuck. "That sure is uh good old pious sort of uh cognomen. We applauds yuh uh heap, but we're down here after oats."

She looks at us sort uh disgusted like and then ambles back to where the other two are standing by some trunks. Pretty quick over comes the he member of the bunch. I say he member, 'cause he's wearing apparel which is appropriate for that certain gender, but that's the only thing that qualifies him. He gets most of his height from the bridge of his nose to his hair-line, and he's sporting uh bunch uh hair on his face between his ears and eyes, which makes him plumb laughable. He stops in front of us and peers some close-like and clears his throat.

"You—er—hem-m-m—I am Doctor Church," says he.

Chuck walks up close and looks at the little person.

"That's reasonable," says Chuck. "Is there anything yuh wanted except to make that announcement?"

"I am—er—rather we are looking for a Mr. Whittaker, who owns a farm called the Crossed—er——"

"Cross J?" asks Chuck, and the doctor nods, delighted like.

"Yes, that is the name. Peculiar name, isn't it, now?"

"Not half as peculiar as the place," says Chuck, sad-like. "You folks looking for that place uh misery?"

"Misery?" asks the doctor. "Did you say misery?"

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"Awful," nods Chuck. "Why, man, you wouldn't believe it if I told yuh. We all feel bad about it—mighty bad, I'll tell yuh, but there ain't uh danged thing we can do."

"Would you mind explaining?" asks the doctor, and Chuck looks at me, foolish-like, and wiggles his ears.

"Well, yuh see it's thisaway," begins Chuck, and just then them two females comes up, and the doctor explains to them that they're going to hear something.

"It's uh most peculiar thing," continues Chuck, serious-like. "I know yuh won't believe me, and I don't blame yuh. It's that old eternal triangle—two men and uh woman. The female person is named Olga Olsen. She's uh Russian.

"The two men are Whittaker, owner of the Cross J, and the other is uh man named Hansen. They both love this Russian. Sabe?"

Chuck has been telling it in uh loud tone so the old lady can get it, and she seems interested uh heap.

"Well," continues Chuck, "Whittaker has lost his mind over her, and he thinks he's Hansen, and Hansen's lost his and thinks he's Whittaker. Ain't it awful? Why, doggoned if things ain't got so nutty around that place that the birds talk."

"Well!" exclaims the doctor. "How interesting. My dear Mrs. Church, in all of my studies I have never heard of a parallel case. I was afraid that the trip was going to be an awful bore, and I only came so Emily could see her uncle, but now I find something better—much better than I ever anticipated. Well, well!"

Chuck wiggles his ears and looks foolish-like at the doctor.

"Just about what are you tickled about?" he asks. "Ain't it awful?"

"Wonderful," squeaks the doctor. "You see, I am an authority on rare diseases of the human brain. I may say that I have been called the Wizard of the Cranium."

"Well," drawls Chuck, "I wish yuh joy. Now, if yuh was out here after ivory—well, we'll get the rest of these oats loaded. I'll take the young lady on the buckboard with me and you other two can ride on the wagon with Mister Peck. Also, he can load your trunks."

"Why do you carry a gun in your belt?" asks the doctor, pointing at Chuck's six-shooter, which is laying over a sack uh oats.

"I'm uh detective," whispers Chuck. "Mister Peck is uh sheriff. There's two other fellers on the ranch which we suspicions of being in league with Olga. It sure is some mix."

"Ah," breathes the doctor. "I see. Do you suppose we will be welcomed? My wife is his former sister-in-law, and the young lady is his niece. None of us ever saw Mr. Whittaker."

"I been thinking it over and I feels that things might not be just right," admits Chuck. "I'll tell yuh what you do: tell him that you're up here looking for uh place to start uh sheep ranch. Hansen loves sheep and he'll take yuh to his bosom."

"But I know nothing about sheep," complains the doctor.

"Nobody does," consoles Chuck. "All you got to do is mention the fact to him and there won't be no questions asked. Sabe?"

MULEY and Telescope has already pulled out for the ranch when we gets loaded up, so we pulls out at once. Chuck takes the loving daughter with him, while I entertains the old couple and their trunks on the load uh oats.

The young lady ain't so hard to look at and I'm sort uh sorry that I didn't pick the buckboard. She giggles uh heap, and "Ah's" at everything, while Chuck wiggles his ears with pleasure and buys her some stick candy at the store.

The old man is setting on the corral fence whittling, when I drives down from depositing my load at the house, but he don't show much interest.

When Chuck unloads the young lady he points out the old man on the corral fence, and tells 'em that it's Mr. Hansen.

"I'm mighty anxious to diagnose his case," states the doctor. "I must begin by inducing memory by degrees. I hope I can converse with him without ruffling his feelings."

Me and Chuck goes over and sets down beside the old man, but he just keeps on whittling.

"We got all the oats," states Chuck, sort uh offhand-like, and the old man stops whittling long enough to spit.

"Who did you bring with yuh?" he asks.

"Friends uh Harelip's," says Chuck.

The old man thinks a long time and then nods.

"Uh-huh. Must uh been in that letter uh his. No wonder he left."

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"Coincidence," remarks Chuck, and the old man snorts:

"Co ——! Her name is Hulda. She's my brother's daughter. I don't know which—I got six. This one sure was fond uh knickknacks. I'd just as soon be kissed by Frank Gotch."

"She sure is uh muscular female," I agree.

"Muscular! Gol dingle dang it! You dang well know she is! She'll be uh lot uh help to us if we ever have to move the house."

We goes down to the bunk-house to wash up, and finds Telescope and Muley playing seven-up.

"What yuh doing, Hen—running uh stage?" laughs Telescope.

"Say, Telescope, what name did yuh go by when yuh was in Wyoming the last time?" asks Chuck, rubbing some lather into his dusty ears.

"None uh your danged business," replies Telescope, letting the cards slide out of his hands. "What's that to you, you short-legged, long-faced oat rustler?"

"Not uh thing," replies Chuck. "I just asked. Uh course it's none uh my danged business."

Telescope studies Chuck's face for uh while and then picks up the cards. Chuck's face is plumb blank.

"What's the main idea, Chuck?" he asks.

"Aw, nothing much," replies Chuck. "I just thought I'd mention the fact that the little deceptive-looking hombre what rode up with us from Paradise is wearing uh little heart-shaped piece uh silver under the lapel of his vest. He mentioned his home in Wyoming. I spoke of you two and he wanted to know what yuh looked like. He wanted especially to know about Telescope. I suspicioned him in uh minute, so I told him that Telescope weighs two hundred and forty and that Muley was over six feet tall. I sure did all I could for yuh. I hate uh lie like the devil hates holy water, but in uh case like this—well, I remembers my friends."

Muley heaves himself right out of his chair and grabs Chuck by the face.

"You danged liar!" he yelps. "You go tell him different right now. You think I wants to suffer for Telescope's sins? You're uh fine friend, you are."

"I ain't got no sins, I'll inform yuh of that, Muley," states Telescope. "You was down in Wyoming last year yourself, and I reckon I got as much right to choke Chuck for misrepresentation as you have. How do I know how bad they wants you down there?"

"Aw, cut it out!" gasps Chuck. "You two big huskies afraid of that little runt. I'll bet you're both in bad in Wyoming—believe me."

"What did he say he was doing up here, Hen?" asks Telescope. "Chuck is the dangdest liar unhung and I don't believe him."

"Well," says I, "it ain't none uh my business any way yuh looks at it, but he did tell me that he was looking for somebody at the Cross J."

I goes out of the bunk-house and starts for the corral, when I hears voices raised in dispute. I turns the corner and finds old man Whittaker setting on the top rail of the corral, and beside him, humped up on the rail, is the doctor. I walks up easy behind them and listens to the conversation.

"Think," orders the doctor. "Think hard."

The old man hunches up his shoulders, and one hand sort uh slides back toward his six-gun.

"You're not the person you think you are," states the doctor, sort uh singing the words. "You're not, you're not. You think you are the owner of this farm, and that your name is Whittaker, but you're all wrong. You don't love Olga. You don't love nobody."

The old man hunches up uh little more, and spits reflectively into the corral. He slides his gun carefully to the front, and then squints at the doctor.

"Think," orders the Wizard of the Cranium, again. "Think of the time when men called you some other name than Whittaker."

The old man nods and spits.

"Uh-huh. I've been called everything."

"No, you have not been called everything. No man has ever been called everything."

"One will have that honor soon," states the old man, softly.

The doctor goes right on singing:

"You are not what you think you are. I know who you are, but you can't remember the name. Don't worry, it will all come to you."

"Say!" explodes the old man. "Who in —— am I?"

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"Hansen," roars the doctor, and just then the top rail breaks.

The doctor's coat catches over uh post, and he peels in midair, and him and the old man mixes right in the corner of the corral. Comes uh flurry uh dust, uh yelp, and the doctor comes out through the side uh that corral like uh rabbit.

"My ——!" exclaims Chuck, who has sneaked up to see. "I thought that corral was hawg tight. Look! He's got uh gun!"

The old man must uh dropped his gun when he lit, 'cause the doctor's hanging on to it like he had cramps in his fingers, and he's turning around and around like uh top.

"Eyes full uh dust," states Chuck. "Look!"

Here comes the old man over the top uh that corral, and he's sure peeved uh heap.

"You gol dingle danged, locoed son of uh biscuit shooter!" he howls, snorting the corral dust out of his eyes and nose. "I'm going to git yuh and git yuh right—me!"

I reckon the little person gets enough dust out of his eyes to see to run, 'cause he lights out for the bunk-house like uh rabbit. I reckon that Telescope and Muley had taken Chuck's talk to heart, 'cause they're in front of the bunk-house with their broncs. Muley has forked his, and Telescope is still on the ground beside his animal, tying uh roll on behind his saddle. The doctor is almost to them before they see him.

Bing! In the excitement of the moment the doctor must uh pulled the trigger uh that gun and she explodes into the dirt.

Bang! she goes again, and by this time the little doctor is almost up to the door.

As I said before, Muley weighs two hundred and forty, and rides the biggest saddle-tree in Montana, but he ain't no prize rider. He's setting there on uh big roan bronc that's afraid of everything on earth, and when the doctor salutes the second time, that roan just simply sunfishes. When Muley comes down he's just in time to envelop the doctor. Comes uh sort of uh squashy squish, and there ain't no doctor in sight.

Telescope gets hit with the rear end of his bronc so hard that he bounces off the log wall an' sprawls flat on his face in the dirt, from where he proceeds to empty his gun regardless.

One bullet scorches the old man across the ankle so he forgets the doctor, hitches up his pants and gallops for the house. Me and Chuck dives into an empty wagon-box and counts six shots before we ventures out.

We sets in the end uh that wagon and rolls uh smoke. Pretty soon we sees Muley turn over, and out from under him emerges the doctor. He's uh sorry-looking brain-fixer, believe me. He toddles all around Telescope and Muley, and then weaves toward the house like uh sleep-walker.

Right in front of us he crosses his legs and falls down, and when he gets up he's headed wrong. Chuck steps over and turns him around, and the little feller toddles on, orating to himself:

"I—am—John—Henry—Smith—and—I'm—up—here—to—start—uh—sheep—ranch. I—am—John—Henry—Smith—and—I'm—up——"

His voice trails off into distance, and we watches him enter the house.

"Hen," says Chuck, "ain't it uh queer thing? You can knock uh man so silly that he can't tell the truth, but if he's got uh lie in his system he'll hang onto it till the cows come home. Hello, Muley. How's all the little birds?"

Muley is standing there like uh big fat baby, with one finger in his mouth. His chaps are down around his feet, and his shirt is split all the way up the back, and is hanging down in front like he was trying to put it on backwards. He nods at us foolish-like and examines his feet.

"Did — anybody—water—the—horses?" he asks, taking uh long time between each word, like the doctor did.

"You—you better not do—do—that again," states uh voice, and we sees Telescope get up on his hands and knees and go hunting around on the ground.

"Lost something?" asks Chuck.

"Pillow," grunts Telescope, and then lays down again.

"Something must surely be wrong," remarks uh voice behind us, and we observes the elderly female and her daughter. They're standing there staring at Muley and Telescope.

"Ma'am," says Chuck, "there sure is something wrong, and I'd advise yuh to go away from here. Them two hombres has been hit by uh snow snake, and yuh can't tell what they might do."

"Gracious!" exclaims the old lady. "Is it fatal?"

"Yes'm," agrees Chuck, "it almost always

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kills the snake. You let us escort yuh to the house before something happens."

They agrees some sudden-like, and the four of us ambles toward the house. When uh man who can cuss like Telescope can is knocked out, it sure ain't no place for uh shrinking female when he starts to recover. We looks back and sees Telescope get painfully to his feet. He goes over to Muley and gives him uh push, and as we enters the house they're reclining lovingly in each other's arms.

WE'RE greeted by some sight inside that house. The doctor, minus most of his clothes, and with his glasses hanging on the end of his nose, is setting in uh chair, humped up like he had uh belly-ache, and right in front of him, on another chair, is the old man. The old man has got his six-gun shoved into the doctor's bosom, and is looking the Wizard of the Cranium square in the eye. The old man is some mussed up, too.

"You're not who yuh think yuh are," whispers the old man, in uh hoarse voice. "You think you're danged smart, but yuh run against uh snag. I know who you are, and so do you. You're crazier than uh bedbug. Sabe?"

"I—I—I know—who I am," chatters the doctor.

"Well, who are you?" snaps the old man.

"I—am—John—Henry—Smith—and—I'm—up—here—to—start—uh—sheep—ranch."

The old man looks at him for uh few seconds, lets his gun slip out of his hand, and grabs the doctor by the foretop. He braces his feet on the rug, and hisses:

"John Henry Smith, you're uh liar if you think you will!" and he lifts the little doctor right out of his chair by the hair.

"Mr. Hansen, you're a coward!" yelps Mrs. Church. "Hurt my husband, will yuh!"

Boof! Swat! Swish!

Right there I takes off my hat to uh broom as uh weapon of offense and defense. That harmless-looking old lady goes plumb loco and combs the old man from hoof to foretop with that broom.

Does the doctor make any attempt to aid his wifely rescuer? He most absolutely does not. The doctor desires the seclusion of the tall and uncut, and he routes himself via the bow in my legs. Not being braced none to speak of, I naturally upends and lands on my classic chin right among the brooms, and the doctor butts his head against the wall, and starts snoring.

I say brooms, 'cause there seemed to be uh dozen, and I gets quite uh dusting before the interruption comes.

"Wah!" whoops uh voice. "My onkle!"

That whoop was the gong that saved me uh knockout, 'cause the broom-handle, that was whizzing straight for my nose, stops six inches short, and I has time to pick the straws out of my eyes and ears and take uh look. It's that person that Chuck designates as being uh Russian.

She certainly is uh busy person, and from the way she heaves furniture around I feels sure that her folks never raised her as uh pet. I see Mrs. Church leave our presence like uh top, and I sees her spin plumb off the front porch. That Russian sure gave her some sudden turn.

That room is suffocating with *Yah's!* and other exclamations of displeasure. I sees Chuck connect with uh flying stool, and then aceept uh reclining position under uh sofa. The old man manages to crawl out of the main bunch uh trouble, and grab the doctor by the ankle as he's sneaking out of the window.

"Sheep!" howls the old man, yanking the doctor back through the window. "Sheep, eh? Way around 'em, Shep!"

"I'll have the law on you, Hansen!" squeaks the doctor, trying to squirm out of his pants. "You'll go to jail for this."

"You won't have no law on me!" yelps the old man. "Maybe your heirs will, but you won't be there, John Henry Smith, shepherd!"

The confusion suddenly stops and I sizes things up. The Russian is the only one still on foot. She stands there in the middle of the room, with uh chair-leg in one hand and uh lot uh hair in the other. She looks at us, sort uh foolish-like, and grins. She sizes up Mrs. Church, who is setting on the floor trying to claw the hair out of her eyes, and then at the old man and the doctor, locked in each other's embraces.

"Oof!" says she, reaching down and tearing the doctor loose. "Hurt onkle, eh?"

Then she heaves that little dilapidated brain-shark through the window, and then struts right out of the door and shuts it behind her.

The old man shakes himself like uh stunned chicken, looks at each one of us

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olemn-like, and then at the smashed indow.

"Well, I'll be gol dingle danged!" he hispers. "My brother must uh married h prize-fighter."

"My Bonnie-e-e-e-e lies over the o-o-o-o-shun: My Bonnie-e-e-e lies over-r-r-r-r the ea," sings Chuck, without moving his ead, or opening his eyes.

The old man stoops over and picks up huck's gun and cocks it.

"What yuh trying to do?" I asks, grabing the gun out of his hand.

"Shoot him—while—he's—happy," sighs he old man, and just then Mrs. Church egins to weep like her insides was broke. Ve waits for her to run down uh little, nd pretty soon she yelps:

"I won't stay here another minute! Horses couldn't hold me here."

" 'There's uh divinity what shapes our nds,' " states Chuck, setting up on the loor, and bracing himself against the sofa. 'My——! The one what shaped mine used uh stool. Hen, feel of the lump on my nead."

Mrs. Church gets painfully to her feet, and starts for the door, and who should come in right at that time but Harelip Hansen. He stands there and looks things over, and then grins.

"Hello, Hansen," says the old man. "Come right in."

"I come to git pay vor gooking," states Harelip. "I no git uh yet."

"Hansen?" asks Mrs. Church, in uh loud voice. "Your name Hansen?"

"Z-zhure. Name's Hansen."

"My poor deluded brother!" exclaims Mrs. Church, grabbing at him like uh drownding man after uh straw. "My poor dead husband's brother. Oh, I'm so glad—so glad!"

Harelip tries to break the clinch, and backs against the wall.

"Hoosbant's brudder!" agrees Harelip, chokingly. "How's Gopenhagen, eh?"

"How's what?" pants Mrs. Church.

"Gopenhagen," grunts Harelip.

"Sounds like lumberjack snuff," opines Chuck, still rubbing his head.

"Copenhagen?" wonders the old lady, at the top of her voice. "What would I know about Copenhagen?"

"Your name Hulda?" asks Harelip.

"Elizabeth," shouts Mrs. Church. "Elizabeth Church."

"Val," states Harelip. "You bedder stop hugging me. You are uh stranger uh mine."

"Very peculiar," states the doctor's voice from the doorway.

"Transposed minds. Very, very peculiar," and then he turns to Harelip: "Think, man. Think hard. You're not Hansen, you're Whittaker."

"I tink you —— fool!" snorts Harelip. "You talk like sheep-herter—you."

"You must remember," argues the doctor, standing there with his collar sticking up the back of his neck like uh Nez Percé war feather, and the perspiration and dirt running off his nose. "Everything depends on bringing back the light of reason before it is too late. You are Whittaker. W-h-i-t-t-a-k-e-r. This farm belongs to you. You are the owner; not that man over there."

Harelip looks around, sort uh foolish-like at Whittaker, and then grins at the doctor.

"Goot," says he. "I'll take it."

The old man sort uh eases himself along the wall, and, sudden-like, reaches up and picks uh Winchester off the deer horns over the doorway. He snaps uh shell into the chamber, and faces us.

"What did you say?" he asks Harelip. "What did you say?"

"Don't shood," wails Harelip. "Aye chust agree mit uh grazy man."

"Hopeless," wails the doctor. "Absolutely hopeless. My dear Mrs. Church, we may as well go back home."

"You ain't as crazy as I thought yuh was," opines the old man. "You do get rational at times."

Comes the rattle of uh wagon, and somebody yells:

"Hey!"

"See who it is, Hen," says the old man, so I sticks my head out of the busted window and sees "Doughgod" Smith.

"Hello, Hen," says he. "I just stopped to see if anybody wanted to ride to town or if the old man wanted anything brought back."

"They do and I don't, Doughgod," yells the old man. "Hang on to yourself, and I'll give yuh uh load—one way only."

"Do we have your permission to leave, Mr.—er—uh—" begins the doctor, but the old man explodes:

"Permission? Gol dingle dang it, yuh got all the permission I ever had. Take my

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blessing and good wishes, and go in peace."

"Or pieces," supplies Chuck, looking at the doctor.

"I met Telescope and Muley up near Tin-Cup Crick," states Doughgod, while the bunch is loading into his wagon. "They seemed in uh hurry."

"I can't blame them," says Miss Church, and just then that fighting foreigner comes around the corner and sizes up the load.

"Aye go too," she whoops, making uh bee-line for the wagon, and nobody disputed her intentions.

"*Wahl*" says she, vaulting into that wagon like uh ton uh lard. "Aye no like das ha'r place. Aye skall go back to Gopenhagen vare birds no talk. Goot-by, Onkle O-o-olaf."

Me and Chuck and Whittaker and Harelip stands there and watches that load roll off down to the main road, and disappear in uh cloud uh dust.

"Mrs. Church," says the old man, sort uh wondering like. "Gol - dingle dang it! Emily Whittaker."

"Onkle O-o-olaf," says Harelip, in the same tone. "Gude ——! Hulda Hokansen."

"Oh ——! Oh ——!" says Cyclops, from the porch rail.

"Which covers everything," says Chuck.

BELOW THE LINE

by WILLIAM DANIEL

BELOW the Line a rusty tramp is steaming
Toward Rio and the southern ports I know.
Below the Line the phosphorus is gleaming
Upon the waves that from her counter flow.
The moon lies low upon the far horizon,
The torn cloud-drift floats past in streamers fine;
The southern ocean calls, and I am going,
Somewhere—somewhere below the Line.

Below the Line the tall, slim palms are waving
As gentle trade-winds blow in from the sea.
Below the Line the murm'ring waves are laving
Upon a firm white beach so dear to me.
The gulls wheel o'er the smiling sparkling water,
And white-clad forms upon the sand recline.
My tropic islands call and I am going
Somewhere—somewhere below the Line.

Below the Line, mid wild, rank vegetation,
Huge, hanging creepers shutting out the skies,
Below the Line, in mystic meditation
A graven god looks with stark, staring eyes
Upon the ancient ruins of his city,
O'errun with mango-tree and tangled vine.
The god and jungle call and I am going
Somewhere—somewhere below the Line.

Below the Line are shining, white-roofed cities
With plazas, where at dusk the maidens stroll;
The native band strums forth its plaintive ditties,
While on the beach the combers boom and roll.
A haunting fragrance drifts upon the breezes,
From where low walls, thick flowering plants confine.
The southern cities call and I am going,
Somewhere—somewhere below the Line.

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Physically Disqualified

By

Frederick Simpich

Author of "The Slave Soul," "Thanks to the Devil," etc.

"BUT listen, sir," Dan Breen had begged, "my old man went down with the *Maine*—and my granddad got winged at Shiloh. I just got to go, Doc! My folks ain't ever been slackers. There must be something I could do—I'm a whale of a man, from my hips up!" And Breen, rolling up his sleeves, put up a right arm—a great knotted, hairy limb that might have graced a viking or a Goliath—making his crooked, wasted legs look weaker and more useless than ever.

"I'm sorry," insisted the Army doctor gently, "I wish I could pass you. But you're—you're, well, you're wholly unfitted for military service."

"But, Doc, us Breens has always been fighters—always been volunteers, too. Yet here I am," grumbled the cripple, "hoeing beans all day in plain sight of them soldiers—hearin' the bugle and the band; seeing 'em at target shooting all day long. Yet all I do is hoe and grub! It's sure ——,with Uncle Sam needing men like he does!"

"He needs beans, as well as men, Breen. Your work is necessary and important," consoled the doctor.

But his kindly words failed utterly to cheer Dan Breen. Clumsily he got up, on his crippled legs, and hobbled from the recruiting office, using two stout sticks to aid his awkward, shuffling progress. And as he hobbled out, he began to curse; to curse his own crooked, flopping legs—cursed them in words of hate and wrath so potent and terrible that even the old recruiting sergeant gasped for breath till Breen had hobbled out of hearing.

Breen's tiny truck farm adjoined the Army reservation; and often when hoeing in the field the cripple would pause from work to listen to the hum of warplanes that spiraled and banked far above him. There were balloons up there, too, sometimes, from the school of aerostatics at the coast fort. But it made poor Breen dizzy and fearful even to look up at them. For, besides his deformed legs, he had yet another great weakness—a great dread of high places.

His father before him had had it—a constitutional, unconquerable fear of heights, a dread of climbing far above ground. Since a fall in childhood, the fall that had shattered his limbs and crippled him for life, this weakness had steadily grown on Breen. Now it had so mastered him that he feared even to go out on the roof of his low shanty to fix a loose shingle, or to climb the tower of his windmill to oil the wheel when it squeaked.

So, it was only once in a long while that he'd even look up at the aircraft far above him; the mere thought of the tiny men up there in the swinging baskets, waving their tiny flags, or of the aviators crouched low in the seats of racing biplanes, was enough to make Dan Breen hug closer to the ground

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he was digging. The idea of being up there himself made him feel sick and faint—weaker than ever in his weak, unsteady knees.

"But on the ground—in them stinking trenches," he brooded, "I could sure fight there! I could whip a million bobcats, if only they'd give me a chance. —— my rabbit legs!"

Till now, the lack of good legs had never seriously troubled Dan Breen. For twenty years he had hobbled about, happy enough on the little farm that had been his father's, raising garden truck for the messes at the fort. Legs didn't matter, in times of peace; it was easy enough, with extra good arms, to get about pulling weeds, hoeing, or picking peas and beans. But now, with Uncle Sam's sons marching to war, a man without good legs was at a disadvantage.

So all at once, more than anything else on earth, Dan Breen suddenly wanted to be as other men, to stand erect and walk in a uniform, carrying a gun. He did not covet his neighbor's ox, nor his ass, nor anything that was his neighbor's—except his neighbor's straight legs. He coveted them, not for his own ease or appearance—but only that he might go to fight. The Breens were that way; to them the flag meant service, sacrifice, death if death beckoned.

IT WAS early morning, the day after the doctor had glanced once at Breen's misshapen limbs and then shaken his head. Breen had been up early, hoeing in the cool dawn. Now he had hobbled over into a thick copse that separated his pea-patch from the Army reservation. From among the straight sprouts and switches of the thicket he had cut an armful of sticks, on which to train his pea-vines. It was an effort for the cripple, and after a while he sat down to rest.

On the other side of the thicket, a few rods from him, a sentry walked slowly back and forth, guarding a captive balloon. It had just been inflated, and was swaying and pitching in the stiff off-shore breeze that blew for two hours or more every morning. The men who tended it had gone to breakfast. Later in the forenoon, when the land breeze had died down, the big bag would be used for observing artillery practise or for short flights by students of the aerostatic school.

Breen mopped his brow, and, from time to time got a glimpse of the sentry, who paced a beat back and forth between the balloon and the edge of the copse. Breen noted the man's erect carriage and well-fitting uniform, and envied him his straight, sturdy legs.

Suddenly, by some odd sixth sense, Breen became aware that the sentry was no longer walking his beat. He sat up, scrutinizing the edge of the copse closely—and saw a quick movement in the thick brush. Sounds came to him, as of something being dragged through the thicket; then he heard voices, low, but excited. Strangely disturbed, Breen crept cautiously forward—crept silently, breaking no dead sticks, stirring no rustling vines—crept as when stalking quail to pot-shoot them as they drank at the spring.

All at once, through an opening in the brush, Breen glimpsed a scene that stunned and amazed him and left him cold with horror. He was on all-fours, crawling, when he caught sight of it—and there he squatted motionless as a pointer-dog. In the brush ahead of him were two men, dragging the body of the sentry. The soldier's head had been crushed. One of his two assailants, a swarthy, weasel-faced little fellow, still gripped a dripping ax. The other, a giant blond, was talking excitedly.

"Quick now, comrade. When I get into the basket, you chop the ropes. The breeze'll carry me right out—the raider is waiting fifty miles offshore."

"Right!" croaked the little man. "And I scoot the minute you're free."

Already they had turned, and were hastening from the brush toward the balloon. Even in the brief glimpse he had caught of them, Breen recognized the two men as civilian laborers from the reservation. He had seen them about, for a week or so, working on roads, and cutting brush when the cantonment was enlarged.

It was the first time in his life that Dan Breen had seen murder; and for a few seconds the shock of it left him dry-lipped, gasping nervously—his mind in a whirl. Then the startling truth—and the sheer daring of it all—began to dawn on him. He knew that spies and alien enemies were in the land; he had read of leaks, of important secrets reaching the enemy, of traitors and their work. And those words the blond man had uttered—he saw it all now!

That big workman in overalls was a spy—

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stealing an Army balloon and sailing out to sea, to be picked up by an enemy raider! Already the big fellow had reached the open field, and was climbing into the balloon basket and the little weasel-faced man was chopping the ropes, chopping with an ax that still dripped red. And here was he, Dan Breen, with useless flopping legs, sprawling stupidly in hiding and letting this devilish work go on . . . Fit only to hoe beans . . . A Breen, not fighting when America was under fire. . . .

With a hoarse, warning yell he scrambled to his shaky legs and flung himself madly forward, fighting for the open, crashing through the yielding brush. Gaining the edge of the copse, he raised his voice in louder cries of alarm, that brought bareheaded soldiers pouring from mess tents across the field. From down the line the corporal of the guard was coming on the run, rifle in hand. Breen, half falling, hobbling grotesquely—for he had left his walking sticks in the brush when he first crept forward to listen—stumbled on across the open, like a giant, wounded crab.

In the same instant that Breen tumbled from the brush, the little man cut the last rope; and the freed balloon, swaying and bobbing, arose from earth with quickening speed. Then straight for Breen rushed the little man, viciously swinging his murder ax, the glare of hate in his distorted face.

"The whole world can't whip us!" he shouted, raising his weapon high overhead to cut down the cripple.

But Dan Breen's thoughts were not on the little man nor the ax, but on the blond man leering wickedly down from the rising basket—a grin of triumph, of contempt for all America on his fat, evil face. So Breen squatted adroitly, and flung himself sideways and missed the stroke of the falling ax. And, as the balloon rushed upward, he caught a glimpse of rope-ends dangling —and of one rope longer than the others—that yet dragged on the ground.

So toward it he hurled himself, still dodging the ax; with all the strength of his body and great arms; literally galloping on all-fours he flung forward and as this last rope-end raced past, his thick, stout fingers closed on it. And Dan Breen, who feared high places, who shrank from climbing his own windmill tower to oil the wheel when it squeaked, hung on to the end of that swinging rope, and felt himself flying higher and higher, the vast, limitless vault of heaven yawning above.

Far below a flat, maplike world was receding. But Dan Breen, panting and terrified, dared not look down. He heard the faraway pop of rifles, rifles in the hands of soldiers running like ants in a hill that is plowed, but Dan did not see the soldiers; instead, he saw only the yawning vault of boundless skies, and a balloon that dragged him higher and higher. And always the awful fear of heights gripped his soul, till sweat flowed from his body and he grew nauseated and sick—sick like a man on a rolling ship.

A tremendous temptation surged up in him, too—a temptation to let go from the rope and drop. It grew on him, this crazy desire, till he felt his sweaty fingers slipping, his grip weakening. Then suddenly by some odd whim of fancy he thought of his father who died on the *Maine*; of his grandfather, wounded at Shiloh, marching on Memorial Days in his old blue uniform. He remembered the impulse that had driven him from the thicket, and urged him to grab the racing rope-end. He remembered the man in the basket, the enemy of America —he remembered that the Breens had always been volunteers.

He began to climb, hand over hand, strongly and steadily now, climbing up toward the man in the basket. He looked up as he climbed. There, fifty feet above him, the blond man was leaning over and leering down at him. Now the man opened a pocket knife—a small one—and was hacking hurriedly at a rope. It was the same rope Breen was on. So he climbed faster, lifting himself nearly three feet at a pull, with his great, gorilla arms.

FEVERISHLY the blond man sawed and sawed with his little dull blade, cutting the inch-rope strand by strand; in another minute or less he would cut it through, and let Dan Breen drop to death a thousand feet below. Faster the cripple climbed, hand over hand, drawing himself up swiftly as a simian swings up a swaying vine in the jungle. Faster he worked up, till he touched the basket, bumping against it; then he reached up, and grasped its rim, grasped it when all but a few strands of the rope—barely enough to hold his weight, remained intact.

With a snarl the blond man struck,

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driving his penknife into Breen's horny knuckles, stabbing again and again, cutting cruelly at the cripple's hand. But Breen only drew himself up slowly, carefully, moved by a vast determination to get into that basket and kill the man inside. Again the blond man struck, and yet again, till he saw he could not loosen Breen's invincible grip. Viciously he stabbed at Breen's throat, but the cripple dodged and caught the blow on the side of his head. Then the blond man seized the basket lines, and swung up till he stood on the rim of the willow cup, his heavy boots on a level with the cripple's face.

Then he kicked Breen. He kicked him with all his great strength, square in the face; kicked him till blood spouted from Breen's nose and lacerated cheeks—kicked till Breen felt loose teeth floating in his foaming mouth. With one final desperate jerk, Breen heaved himself over the cage rim, to fall panting, blinded and dizzy on the creaking wicker floor. Instantly the blond man sprung, landing with his heavy boots fair in Dan Breen's ribs, seeking to crush them in.

With a grunt Breen shoved him off, swept the blood from his eyes, and rose—rose groping, slowly, like a groggy bulldog. When he had got his great arms about his blond foe, he squirmed and twisted, and slipped, till he was behind the man; then his enormous fingers closed on the red, hairy throat. Grappling now, locked in as strange a struggle as ever the sun shone on, the enemies fought—fought what each knew was a fight to the death. Back and forth they swayed, falling from side to side of the rocking basket.

Even above the whistle of the wind in the lines, Breen could hear the shrill breath of his choking victim. Once, in falling, they got foul of a dangling line; it was tugged down and far above a gas valve opened, and they began to descend. But of this, Dan Breen knew nothing. He only knew that victory was his; that he, crippled Dan Breen, unfit to serve, had served anyway—that he had fought a great fight, and was killing an enemy of his country.

The blond man's hideous grinning face had turned purple now; his blackened tongue lolled out, and his eyes, leering and glazed, were fixed horribly on Breen, as he slowly sank to the cage floor. Then Breen, too, collapsed from sheer exhaustion.

It was the lap of cold salt water, minutes later, that aroused the cripple. The descending balloon had touched on the sea; but relieved now of the weight of the basket and its cargo, the big gas bag, still more than half inflated, was wobbling and careening above, like a giant jelly-fish, touching the waves from time to time as it was rolled about by the wind. Close up to Breen's face, as he opened his eyes, appeared the face of the dead man whose body was afloat in the half-filled basket. The dead foe's coat, torn nearly off in the terrible struggle, showed Breen a bulky package in an inner pocket. Dazed, stupid, still barely conscious, Breen mechanically robbed the corpse and stowed the papers in his own ragged blouse.

The pitching of the basket kept tossing the body against Breen. To his distorted fancy it seemed the body was still showing fight. He imagined that the dead thing was trying, even now, to eject him from the basket. With a curse he struck it in the face, and shoved it away. The basket, getting wet, was sinking farther down now. To keep his head above water, Breen crawled up on the cage, and climbed out a ways against the yielding bag, holding fast to its lines. He lay there, resting, as on a great mattress. Above was blue sky, and fleecy clouds.

Far toward shore, a growing smudge showed, as racing destroyers from the coast patrol pursued the fugitive balloon.

Presently a larger wave came and rolled the basket, so that the dead man slipped out, and lightened it. Then a strange thing happened. The big balloon, released of this considerable weight, slowly lifted from the water. Breen, hanging like a bat on a ceiling, found himself in a moment carried clear of the sea, the empty basket swaying far below him. Caught again by the wind, the big bag drifted to the west—rising a hundred feet or more into the air.

Around and around the balloon turned, like a great top, its balance disturbed by the weight of the man who hung now half under it, gripping the lines with his hands, hanging as a parrot to the wall of its cage.

Presently the boom of a gun came to Breen's ears, came faintly, as from across far waters. Then another, and an angry shell screamed past him. Another, and another; then a rending shock, a burst of blinding flames and black smoke as an

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explosive shell ignited the captive gas. As it burnt, the wreck fell slowly into the sea, to lay on the water, sizzling and steaming. The wounded cripple, his spark of life all but extinguished, clutched instinctively at the hot, smoking wreckage and clung to it till the destroyer came, and picked him up.

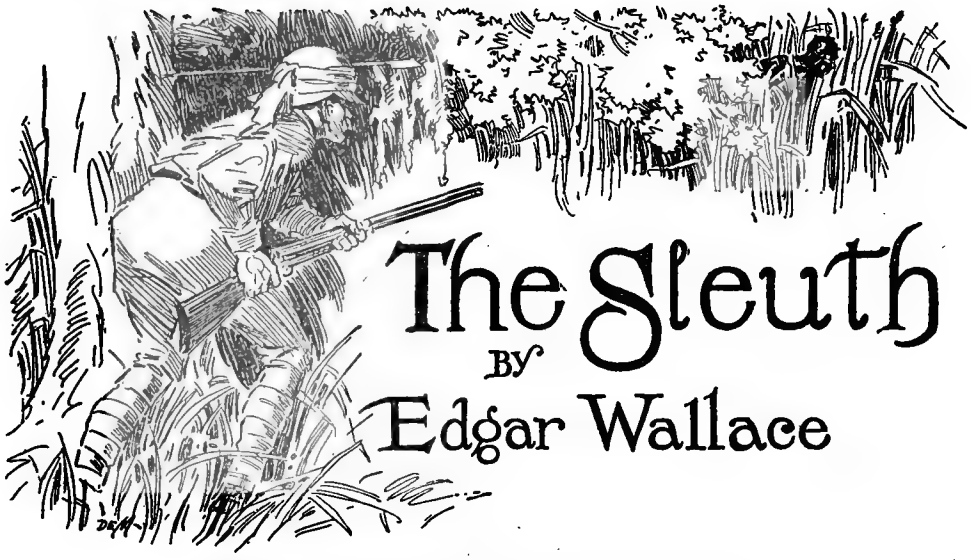
BESIDE Breen's cot in the shore hospital an Army doctor anxiously watched; he was the same doctor who had glanced once at those twisted legs and then shaken his head the day Breen tried to enlist. A stocky, keen-eyed grayish man was there too, with stars on his shoulders, talking in low tones to the doctor. He was just in from the beach, where a body had come ashore. And he had recognized the body; it was that of a famous old-world spy, a secret agent the general had known years before, when he himself had been a military attaché in Europe.

"Poor chap—he found 'something to do' —something big after, all," said the doctor, a bit unsteadily.

Softly, from out on the parade-ground, came the clear sweet notes of a bugle; then the triumphant, masterful crash of "The Star Spangled Banner."

Suddenly the broken, blinded man on the cot sat up, and cried aloud, joyfully:

"There's dad!" he shouted, "and granddad too, wearin' his Grand Army suit, an' totin' his old musket! And they're wavin' me to come on. Yes, dad, I'm coming. Look! My legs are strong and straight—I'm coming!"



The Sleuth

BY

Edgar Wallace

Author of "A Maker of Wars," "The Fluent Adventurer," etc.

MR. COMMISSIONER SANDERS sat in the palaver house of an N'gombi village, and the deep circle of half-naked cannibals who squatted about him were not happy. The cooking pots of the village were untended, for the women and even the children had gathered at the edge of the crowd to hear in what manner Sandi would accept an embarrassing situation.

All the morning the chief and his headmen had been talking, walking about the semicircle and waving their arms in gesticulations which betokened at once their earnestness and apprehension and now the last speaker had finished and it was the turn of the Law-Giver.

"All this morning have I listened to you," said Sanders in the deep-chested Bomongo tongue, "until my ears have grown weary. Now this I know. That in the full of the sixth moon I come to this village as is the custom to take in my two hands the taxes you must pay to the Government. So much fish, so much manioc, so much corn and rubber and ivory.

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"Now, you tell me that your hunting has been poor, and that your crops have been bad, and your young men have been too sick to go into the far forest to tap the trees and that I must take to my king one-half of what is his due.

"Now I know, because I have many spies, that you have given great feasts and have had dances and have traded your rubber with the Arabi for foolish trinkets. Now this I tell you, that I will come to you when three moons have passed and you shall give me all that you owe and then when another three moons have gone I will come again and you shall give me full measure. This palaver is finished."

He rose stiffly from his stool and walked through the throng which gave way sullenly and with lowering brows—for this order meant much work for the young men—and walked through the village. Standing before the hut of the chief M'liko was the little daughter of the house, a wilting, dejected figure. Sanders was fond of children and he laid his hand upon the child's head and said—

"What is wrong with you, M'jibini?"

"Lord," said the child, "I have a great pain in my head."

"Go my big ship," said Sanders, "and speak with my soldier *capita* and he will give you good medicine."

It is a fact that the little girl did not go but overcome by fright at having been spoken to by so great a man ran into her father's hut.

The chief, M'liko, came to the beach to see Sanders depart.

"Lord," said M'liko, "we are poor and feeble men and what magic can you give us that we may perform all the terrible tasks you have set us?"

Sanders looked at him through narrowed lids.

"This day," he said quietly, "my magic shall begin to work and you will see that I am very powerful."

And he steamed away down-stream leaving a fuming and an insubordinate chief to scowl at the wake of the white *Zaire*.

That night the chief's daughter died suddenly and a vengeful M'liko called his kindred together to tell them of the magic, Sandi had wrought.

"This we know," said M'liko, "that Sandi has been very cruel to the people of this village—now he has done the worst of all for he has put his hand upon the child of my second wife and she has died the death."

He touched the ground to the left and to the right to propitiate the ghost of the dead child and all who listened did the same.

"Now if we do not work," said M'liko, "Sandi will come here and he will blast all our children by his magic for this he has promised to do by his own mouth. Shall we wait to die?"

He peered round at the terrified faces and saw that his kindred were with him.

This happened a week before the events which are recorded below.

ON A hot Spring evening Lieutenant Tibbetts strutted across the Housas' parade-ground, his brow wrinkled in a fierce frown. Now and again he would stop, open the big book he carried under his arm, read a passage and apparently memorize the wisdom he culled, for he threw up his head, closed his eyes and appeared to be praying.

His superior, Captain Hamilton, watched the performance with annoyance. Mr. Commissioner Sanders was a puzzled and amused spectator, but the girl who stood between the two men in the shade of the residency veranda was all gurgling merriment.

"What the dickens is wrong with Bones?" demanded Hamilton fretfully. "Is he training for a Buddhist priest or something?"

Bones came nearer, discovered with an exaggerated start that he had an audience, and with a smile wholly self-conscious and apologetic, came with quick mincing strides to the veranda steps humming what he was pleased to describe as a "snatch" in a loud, unmusical hum.

"Whenever you start singing, Bones," growled Hamilton, "I am reminded of the noise which a gramophone makes before the needle strikes the harmony."

Bones clicked his heels and saluted. This heel-clicking of his was a new accomplishment which for some reason was particularly irritating to Hamilton.

"Where on earth did you pick up that disgusting habit of yours, Bones?" he snarled.

The temperature was only 104° in the shade, but the Housa captain was shaking off an overnight attack of malaria.

"Dear old sir an' almost father," said

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Bones airily, "there are certain jolly old stunts that a feller who is studyin' for the Service has to get acquainted with."

"What service—are you going to buttle?" asked his incredulous chief, "and what is that book you're hiking around?"

Bones handed the volume to the other without a word.

" 'Twenty years in the Secret Service by an ex-Spy,' " read Hamilton and glared at his imperturbable junior.

"Oh Bones!" cried the admiring girl, "you're not going to be a secret service man —how perfectly splendid!"

Bones flushed with pride, screwed in his monocle and clicked his heels again, bowing from the waist downward.

"Army's a bit dull, dear Miss Patricia Hamilton," he said, "no chance for a feller with brains and that sort of thing. All very well for a dear old gentleman like Ham—no offense, jolly old skipper—but for a bright lad with vision an' judgment——"

"Do you mean to tell me that you're swotting up this kind of stuff?" demanded Hamilton smacking the book with his cane.

"Just pickin' up a few hints—that's all," Bones clicked his heels again, saluted and bent double.

"Swedish drill, too? Good Heavens, Bones!" said Hamilton wilfully dense, "what a deuce of a lot of things you have to learn in the secret service! Can you do conjuring tricks?"

Bones shrugged his shoulders, raised his eyebrows and spread out his palms in a gesture of despair.

"Watch him closely everybody," said Hamilton admiringly, "he's going to palm a rabbit!"

Bones cleared his throat.

"Between the diplomatic an' the military mind, my jolly old officer, there's a chasm which——"

"Dinner," said Sanders briskly, "Bones, we will celebrate your admission to the Great Service in anticipation in the usual way—Oh, Abiboo, bring me from the cold cellar of my fine house one bottle of the wine with the golden end and also one bottle of wine with the dust of many days."

"What has put me on to the idea," said Bones, over the coffee and one of Sanders' black cheroots, which Bones with politeness made a heroic effort to enjoy, "was a remark dropped by that naval person—you remember, sir?—leading up to my daring conduct on the night of the 14th ultimo?"

Hamilton nodded.

"Naturally, it is a very difficult and dangerous job requiring a certain amount of observation and powers of deduction, but this jolly old book of mine, sir, is a regular corker. The disguises that fellow tried! The jolly old dodges he tried! Full of hints, sir. One of the most valuable works in my collection."

"What is your collection?" asked Hamilton innocently.

"Well, to be absolutely accurate, dear old friend," explained Bones, "I haven't got the collection yet, but I have written home for books on the criminal and physiognomy, all Lombroso's stuff an' a complete manual on the finger-print system. I am also thinking of getting another microscope for blood-stains and all that sort of thing."

Sanders was eying the young man thoughtfully.

"Do you really think you have an aptitude for following clues?"

"An aptitude," scoffed Bones, "my dear excellency, it's a gift. Why, when I was a kid about so high——"

"Suppose something very important disappeared from the residency, do you think you could track it down?" asked Sanders and added, "I am asking you this because seriously Bones, if you are keen on that kind of work I might be of some assistance to you."

"Give me," said Bones impressively, "a button off the jolly old criminal's coat, a bit of his cigar ash, a handkerchief he has worn, anything you like and leave the rest to me."

"I wonder," said Sanders.

THAT Bones was an advanced pupil in the art of deduction he demonstrated the next morning when he met Hamilton on the edge of the reservation wood. Hamilton was rather burdened for he carried a fisherman's creel and under his arm a thick bundle of rods.

"You've been fishin', sir," said Bones carelessly. "From certain indications I gather you've had no luck. On your way back you met a man of the village who asked you whether he might hunt in the reservation forest, to which you replied——"

"How on earth did you know this?" demanded Hamilton.

"Simple, dear old sir," said Bones with an

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indulgent smile, "in the first place your creel is empty."

"As a matter of fact, it is full," said Hamilton opening the lid of the basket and revealing an orderly mass of silver trout, "only it happens to be Sanders' creel."

"Well, anyway," said the unruffled Bones, "you've been fishin'——"

"On the contrary I have been shooting," replied Hamilton with annoying calm, "but I happened to overtake the chief and he asked me for my gun—he saw a hawk over the trout pond. I took his rod and traps and came on."

Bones rolled his head from side to side in a gesture of impatience.

"But tell me, how did you know I met a man who wanted a license to shoot?"

"Ah!" said Bones in triumph, "there I've got you, dear old fellow. In the first place by the dust on your boots——"

"To be perfectly frank I didn't meet him," interrupted Hamilton, "but Sanders did. M'fufa of Besibi. He said you had told him you couldn't give a permit and had sent him along to me—am I right, sir?"

Bones coughed.

"Deduction, dear old man, is one of those dinky little sciences that are in their infancy," he said hurriedly, "an' now let's turn to more serious subjects."

"*Bang! Bang!*"

"I wonder if Sanders got his hawk," said Hamilton turning his face in the direction from whence the sharp explosions came.

"Personally," said Bones, "I should not have taken two shots at a hawk. I should have taken only one, dear old sportsman."

"At the end of which time," suggested Hamilton, "your hawk would have been half-way home. What is your serious subject, Bones?"

They strolled together to the residency and Bones poured forth a story concerning a certain shortage of stores due apparently to the fact that the last man who visited the store forgot to turn and remove the key. Bones condemned in the fiercest language, the stupidity, the carelessness and the criminal folly of a man who leaves a store unlocked in the midst of representatives of the Kano race. He concluded that the last person who had gone into the store had forgotten to lock the door, had, in fact, left the key in the lock and invited Hamilton to search out the offender and visit upon him the severest penalties that military law allowed.

"You were in the store after lunch yesterday," accused Hamilton.

"Me?" said the indignant Bones. "Certainly I was in the store."

"Did you lock it?"

"Did I lock it?" gasped Bones, clasping his forehead. "Did I lock it? Now, I wonder if I did lock it!"

"Of course you didn't lock it, you silly ass," said Hamilton, "who else could it have been? I gave you the key which you did not return."

"It was a mistake," said Bones mildly, "that anybody might make—anybody, I don't care who it is, dear old Ham, *you* might have made it yourself. If you can not trust your own men who can you trust? Dear old lenient superior, have a heart!"

The matter of the rifled store—no more than a bolt of cloth was missing and that had been heavily drawn upon—lasted until the lunch gong sounded.

Patricia Hamilton joined them on the veranda at a moment when the argument was becoming rather heated and managed to soothe them both. Ten minutes passed, but there was no sign of Sanders.

Another five minutes passed and Hamilton was growing a little alarmed when Sanders appeared on the edge of the wood and came walking slowly toward the residency. His gun was under his arm and there was in his face that far-away look of detachment which came to him in very critical moments. He mounted the steps of the veranda, slowly put down his gun and then as if on second thoughts took it up again and carried it inside the building.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting," he said. "If you don't mind I will wash my hands."

"What have you got there, sir?" asked Hamilton, for Sanders was holding very gingerly a thin arrow.

"BE CAREFUL," warned the commissioner and held up the point. The two men looked and Hamilton uttered an exclamation, for the point was covered with a thin coating of brown gum.

"Poisoned! Where did you find it?" asked Hamilton.

"It nearly found me," said Sanders grimly. "I was looking for my hawk when it whizzed not an inch from my shoulder."

"But who—?" began Hamilton.

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"I didn't see the gentleman," said Sanders with a little smile, "I fired twice at the bush from whence it came and searched the path."

He went into his room and reappeared cheerily enough, in time to hear the conclusion of the many suggestions which Bones was making to bring the miscreant to justice.

"Leave the matter entirely in my hands, dear old sir," he said rising to his feet. "Already I have one or two clues which are working themselves out in my mind."

"They will die from congestion," said Hamilton.

"It seems awfully alarming," said the girl seriously. "Do you think they will make another attempt?"

"No, I don't think so," said Sanders, airily.

He was a poor hand at a lie and convinced nobody. Later he brought the two men together.

"I don't know who the fellow is, but from the news I had from the N'gombi this morning I should imagine it is M'liko. Ahmet sends word that the chief is spreading a story that I killed his child by witchcraft—that is always a murder palaver. I expect him to make another attempt tonight, but I don't want your sister to know."

"Why not let me put a guard round the reservation?" suggested Hamilton.

Sanders shook his head.

"You could do it for one night, or for two, but you could not keep it up with your small force. No, let him come as soon as he likes —tonight for preference."

Bones suddenly rose.

"This jolly old rascal can't come by the beach," he said rapidly, "he can't come by the quay, he must come along the bush path. Leave it to me! I have got an idea in my head, sir," he tapped his forehead and was all a-quiver with excitement, "trust old Bones! I will save you!"

"Where are you going, Bones?" asked Hamilton.

"Trust me, sir," said Bones incoherently, "this is one of the grandest ideas——"

He stumbled out of the room, crossed the veranda and reached the ground in two strides and they heard his raucous voice calling for Ali Abid before he was half-way across the parade-ground.

They saw no more of Bones that day, but later in the afternoon came his solemn familiar with a strange request.

"Sir," said Ali confronting Hamilton, "my lord needs a consignment of brown enveloping paper or alternative supplies of ancient press journals."

"What does he want it for?" asked Hamilton in surprise.

"Sir," said Ali profoundly, "for criminal detections by scientific brain-waves."

He was handed a roll of brown paper and made his way back to his master.

What Bones was doing none knew. There was a tangle of bush behind his house to which he retired with a large saucepan and they saw the smoke of his fire and Abiboo and many others complained bitterly of a vile smell that came therefrom, permeating the married quarters to an unbearable degree.

Bones sent his excuses for dinner and they did not see him again that night.

"So far as I can make out by judicious inquiry," said Hamilton, "he is making a peculiarly messy kind of fly-paper with a patent bird-lime which he and his infernal servant are concocting together."

"Bones does well," said Sanders with that fleeting smile of his, "but I can scarcely imagine that he hopes to catch M'liko by that method."

They made a show of retiring for the night at ten o'clock. The girl was the first to go.

"Are you going to bed soon?" she asked.

"In a few minutes," said Hamilton glibly.

He and Sanders sat talking in quiet tones for half an hour, then Sanders disappeared into his room and came back with two rifles, one of which he handed to Hamilton.

"The moon will be down in a quarter of an hour," he said, "and that is about the time we may expect to meet our friend in the forest."

"What is the plan?' 'asked Hamilton taking the rifle and softly opening the breech.

"I will go forward into the woods," said Sanders, "and do a little stalking. You remain half-way between the residency and the wood in support."

They passed noiselessly from the house. The moon was already behind the trees and there was only the light of the stars.

"I wonder what Bones is doing," whispered Hamilton.

"I have great faith in Bones," replied Sanders.

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THE LEFT Hamilton at the appointed spot and went forward into the black wood. He moved silently and cautiously, for Sanders was a great hunter. There was no sound when he stopped, as he did from time to time, and he came to the narrow entrance of the forest path without discovering any sign of his enemies.

He stood at the entrance of the leafy alley for some time and then—

"Oh, white man," said a mocking voice right ahead of him, "I see you."

Something snicked past him and Sanders ducked and brought his rifle to his shoulder. There was another twang and this time the arrow passed over him. He fired right ahead, though he knew that the men who were attacking him had taken cover behind the trees. In the momentary flash of the explosion he thought he saw a face and fired again. He heard a scamper as of men running and springing up took two steps forward; but something caught him by the foot and held him.

He stumbled, put out his hand and touched a soft gluey mess. Before he could think what had happened, he had put down his other hand to get a purchase to raise himself and found that caught also. He pulled sharply and there was a tearing sound but the limed paper, though it came away, still clung to him. In an incredibly short space of time he was almost enveloped from shoulder to foot in a score of flapping detaining squares of paper which literally held him to the ground. He forced himself forward only to fall upon his knees into yet another well-limed trap.

Bones had done his work very thoroughly. The paper had been glued to canvas and the canvas had been staked to the ground and over all had been spread this horrible viscid composition.

In that moment of quick anger Sanders spoke of Bones. He did not speak of him nicely. He did not refer to the excellent services which the enthusiastic young sleuth-hound had rendered to the state in other capacities.

Hamilton heard his shout and came running up, but some one was there before him.

"Is that you, dear old excellency," said a voice from the bush, "have you got 'em? What do you think of old Bones now?"

Sanders said nothing for a moment and then:

"I will tell you later, Bones. I was hoping you had heard."

"Surely," gasped Bones, "surely, sir—surely, you haven't walked into it! Bless my heart alive! This is terrible! I shall never forgive myself, dear old excellency!"

It took them half an hour to strip the "fly-papers" from Mr. Commissioner Sanders. Fortunately, Hamilton had an electric pocket-lamp which assisted materially in the operation, but neither Sanders, nor his helpers for that matter, were very presentable when the last of the papers had been forcibly torn from his person and flung into the bush.

"The men got away, sir, I am afraid," said Hamilton.

Sanders nodded.

"I saw M'liko," he said, "that was quite enough. In another two strides I'd have had him—lend me your lamp."

He flashed the light along the path.

"Bones, I shall find it difficult to—" He stopped. "Hello!" he said.

He went cautiously ahead keeping his lamp on the ground and with the butt of his rifle he tapped the grass-covered path before him. As he did so the whole of the path for a length of four feet and a width of three caved in and vanished. He flashed his lamp into the hole. It was a small pit such as the natives construct when trapping elephants, with this exception, that at the bottom were twenty up-turned spear-heads and each was coated with brown gum.

Sanders looked. He knew that one scratch from one of those spear-heads meant death and he saw the whole plan in a flash. That wild scamper in the dark had been intended to lure him on. All that night M'liko had been working at the hole and planting his poisoned spears, covering his work with thin reeds and grass lest his victim carry a lantern and discover the trap.

"Two more strides," said Sanders thoughtfully, "if I hadn't struck your fly-papers, Bones——"

"Exactly, your excellency," said Bones not without dignity, "you grasp my idea?"

"You are a great man, Bones," said Sanders, "a truly great man."

"That is what *I* say!" said Bones.

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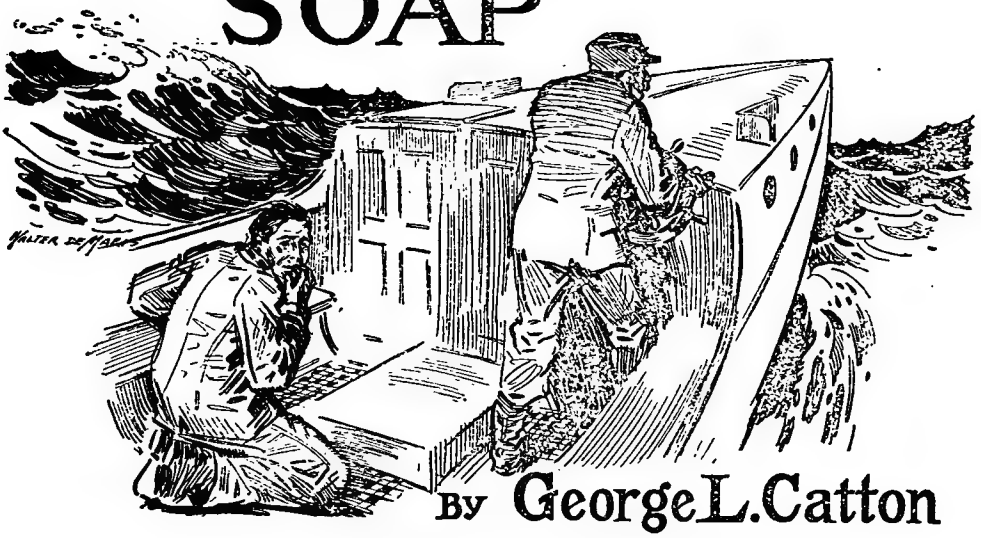
SOAP



By George L. Catton

Author of "The Gift of Experience," "He Said He Would," etc.

BEN HALE was dirty.

Tall and straight like a Norway pine, Ben Hale was as fine a specimen of meat as one could pick out of the State of Minnesota—but his looks lied. "Get the money," was Ben Hale's creed. So far in his twenty-five years' existence he had balked at nothing that could be accomplished legally—with the remuneration consistent with the work involved. Business was business, regardless. And dirty thinking means rotten nerves—always.

It was the last of October outside Ben's little real-estate office in the village of Stowville. The driving snow was beating the last of the painted leaves from the gaunt branches of the fringe of willows on the lake shore across the road. But the cedar knot in the big heater behind him was flaring heatedly; his after-dinner cigar had come parcel-post, and—and the world was all right. Tomorrow, Old Joe Montgomery's fifty-six acres would fall into his hands. Saturday he would close the big deal with The Wool-Sheep Company. Tuesday he would be back home in Duluth.

He dropped his feet from the desk, spread a map and traced his finger across it.

There were eleven thousand, one hundred and fifty-six acres in that ridge of rock-piles and brush that The Wool-Sheep Company wanted. The several owners of it had grabbed at twenty-five dollars an acre for rock—all but Old Joe Montgomery. Now, tomorrow was the twenty-eighth. Old Joe's fifty-six acres would be tacked on to the rest. He grinned. He'd clean up an even twenty-five thousand dollars on the turnover.

Ben hoisted his feet back up on the desk and came to the audible conclusion that Old Joe was—

"An old fool!"

A MILE away, down the shoreline as a launch runs, Old Joe Montgomery pushed his chair back from the table and glanced around the room. This was his home. That fifty-six acres and the solid little cabin on the lake shore belonged to him — today. Tomorrow . . . .

Old Joe felt for his pipe, his hard blue eyes ablaze.

Old Joe merely looked old. Summer suns and Winter frosts and storms had dried and wrinkled his skin till it resembled faded russet pebble-leather. Sixty, one judged. Yet beneath that heavy blue-flannel shirt, rolls and knots of stringy beef bunched easily under a hundred-and-fifty-pound pack of raw furs; or strung taut in the setting of two-men gill nets. Old Joe's constitution laughed at his fifty-odd years, and he never misunderstood that laugh.

Old Joe drained the coffee pot into his

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cup, drained the cup in one long swallow and filled his pipe.

Tomorrow was the twenty-eighth—the last day of grace. Tomorrow he must be at Ben Hale's office in the village by twelve noon, with twelve hundred dollars, or—get out! He shook his head. That fifty-six acres would belong to Ben Hale tomorrow, if Ben Hale was of the breed he judged him to be. He lit his pipe, dropped the blazing match-end into his empty coffee cup and sat in silent contemplation of the tiny flame.

Tomorrow was the twenty-eighth and....

Old Joe sat up with a jerk. He stared down into the coffee cup. The tiny flame sizzled out.

Over by the window Old Joe dragged his finger through the wet coffee grounds in the bottom of his cup, and his pipe went out. Across the room he reached the coffee can down from the shelf and spread its contents thinly out on a sheet of white paper. Then he went out. He was gone twenty minutes. When he came back he climbed into the big forty-foot launch below the cabin and turned her up toward the village.

Old Joe Montgomery was going to call on Ben Hale on the twenty-seventh.

LOOKING out of the window, Ben saw Old Joe tying up under the fringe of willows across the road. His business heart nearly missed a beat. He barely gave Old Joe time to close the door.

"That little matter of the mortgage, Joe?" He yawned to hide his anxiety. "Tomorrow's the twenty-eighth, you know."

Old Joe didn't see the customary box of cigars slid across to him.

"Yes," he drawled, "that's what I'm here for. I'm stuck, Mr. Hale. As a personal favor I'm going to ask you to hang on to that fifty-six acres for thirty days. I've run into a pretty good proposition. It ought to pan out big. If you'll wait a month, I think I'll be able to give you two thousand for that mortgage. You'll make eight hundred."

Maybe it was for the sake of appearance; or perhaps it was relief from anxiety—Ben waited in a wrinkle-browed study for a full minute before he shook his head.

"Sorry, Joe," he smiled apologetically, "much as I'd like to, I can't. I've got to get this business off my hands and get back to the city. I've been here fifteen months now, and these little villages get on my nerves." Then in an assumed burst of sudden confidence—"To tell you the raw truth, Joe, I'm short of money. And there's a party who will take that whole ridge off my hands on Saturday."

Old Joe nodded his head. The jaw muscles below his ears stood out in rigid knots.

"The Wool-Sheep Company, I know!" he growled. "They're the people who stole all my papers and questioned my ownership of that bit of shore! They're the people who made me waste the last dollar I'd saved, the twelve hundred I got from you, and every cent I've made this year, holding my own! And, Hale, if that boat out there was all paid for, much as I need it, I'd sell it for half what it's worth to keep them from getting their hands on that place of mine! Tell me—why are they so —— anxious to get that fifty-six acres?"

Ben slid the map across the desk.

"If you'll look at the lay of that ridge, Joe, you'll see that your fraction is every last inch of it that touches the lake. Sheep have to have water, you know."

Old Joe lit his pipe and dropped the blazing match-end on the floor.

And where there's sheep there's goats!" he snarled. "In every big deal there's got to be a goat! I wouldn't sell, so they frame it up with you to back me into a corner and twist it away from me! I'm the goat!"

Ben leaned forward and tapped the angry man's knee.

"Look here, Joe," he frowned. "Why didn't you sell when they offered you fifty dollars an acre? That's a pretty stiff price for rocks and brush in this neck of the Raw."

"Aye! for sheep raising!" Old Joe snorted. "But I've slaved three hundred and sixty-five days a year for twenty years to——"

He got up slowly, his hard blue eyes ablaze. He drove his fists deep into his jacket pockets.

"Listen, Hale!" he rasped. "I'm not going to say a word to The Wool-Sheep Company. They may be good fellows individually—it's that thing they breed when they get together on business that hasn't got a soul. No! I'm going to talk to you! I've got you culled out! I know your breed!"

He dragged his pipe out of his mouth and jammed it into his pocket.

"Hale," he rasped on, "there's just two kinds of the go-get-it breed—the clean man, and—the other; and they keep pretty well

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abreast in the getting. It's after they've got, that the big difference shows up. When the clean man gets, he goes fishing. But the other never rests. He can't! He's got to spend the rest of his life looking for a cake of soap!"

Ben jumped to his feet.

"Sit down!"

Old Joe's roar echoed across the little office like an explosion, and Ben's rotten nerves sent him back with a thud into his chair.

"You're working for something, Hale!" Old Joe brought his feet together and advanced the right a full pace. "You're trying to get something in this world. So am I. You're pointing every step you take at that something. So am I. You'll get that something some day. So will I. But I'm working clean, Hale—taking what's coming to me and keeping my feet out of other men's faces. But you! You're dirty, Hale! When you get what you're after it won't be worth a —— to you! Your heart will be flyblown and your soul will be crawling with lice! You'll stink!—unless——"

Old Joe's left foot came up beside the right. His hard blue eyes narrowed to slits. Then his lips met in one thin line.

"Hale!" he snorted. "I'd hate like —— to have to touch you, but"—his huge fist crawled up out of his jacket pocket—"I'm going to give you a bath!"

Ben Hale fastened his eyes on that heavy black revolver that stared him straight in the face, and his high color fled.

"You—you wouldn't kill me?" he gasped.

"No!" Old Joe's head jerked sideways in the direction of the safe. "But if you don't get that mortgage and the deeds to that ridge and put them in your pocket, I'll make an awful mess of you!"

Ben got up and shot a glance out of the window. His office was in the last building at the end of the street, and, unless they had business with him, few ever came down that far. He crossed to the safe and knelt down at the combination. Old Joe Montgomery was disliked as the hardest man on the bay.

WHEN Ben stood up again the documents were in his hand. He slipped them into his breast pocket, and some of his lost nerve came back.

"This is a hold-up!" he began. "This is a crime that you ——"

Old Joe shut him off.

"You're going with me!" he snapped. "You're going to walk straight across to that boat! I'll be right behind you!"

Ben looked at the leather-skinned face, at the iron jaws, at the blazing eyes—and all the time he was locking the door, crossing the road and climbing into the boat, he knew that, if Old Joe's finger released it, a couple of thicknesses of cloth would hardly stop that heavy bullet.

Twenty minutes later, under the critical eye of Old Joe and the menacing eye of the revolver, Ben bound his own two legs to the legs of a chair in that solid little cabin on that fifty-six acres. Old Joe bound his arms. Then with a grim sneer as the only notice of Ben's cursing, Old Joe began to pack up.

Flour, bacon, potatoes, beans; a rifle, blankets, an ax—the packs went into the launch. Night was dropping down in the storm when he finally ran thirty gallons of gasoline into the launch tank and released his prisoner. He ordered him into the boat.

"Where are you taking me?"

The revolver was nowhere in evidence when Ben stopped on the little wharf to ask that question. The next moment he picked himself up in the boat, rubbing his shoulder where the old man's fist had caught him. He sat down. Dirty thinking means rotten nerves.

Old Joe took the wheel. Lake Superior is a treacherous sheet of water, as erratically stormy as the North Pacific. Few venture out far even in promising weather; but Old Joe didn't hesitate. He had fished the lake, and hunted and trapped its north shore for twenty years, and in men of his type familiarity breeds—an understanding.

Cap down, feet wide apart, huge hands vised on the wheel, Old Joe opened out the gas and swung up sharply into the storm.

With her stern deep with the build of her and deeper still with her load well aft, the big forty-footer heaved her sharp prow into the smother of froth and mounted to the boiling crest of the first giant roller. Then the wind caught her and drove her off. Old Joe brought her back as she slid down into the trough. At the top of the next roller she took the gale square, shook herself, fought for her head. She won. With her six-cylinder, sixty-horse-power heart throbbing faintly in the roar of the storm with the monotonous accuracy of the purr of a cat, she slipped over and down into the

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trough on an even keel. She had lost her individuality. Just as long as her steel hull hung together out there in that heaving desert of nightcapped waves, she would be part of Old Joe—the obeying part.

Amidships, crouched down out of the direct drive of the stinging spray and wind, Ben Hale cursed. Two feet from him, in easy reach of a swinging fist, a massive figure stood up in the driving snow like a grotesque granite statue of self-reliance. He was cursing that. Yet there was something very satisfying in the knowledge that that anchored wind-break at the wheel was Old Joe Montgomery, the hardest man on the bay.

Ben knew why Old Joe never turned his head, entirely ignoring him. If for any reason Old Joe's hands lost for the fraction of a second their grip on that wheel . . . Lake Superior rarely gives up its dead. And Ben knew that Old Joe knew he knew.

Bounced and bruised and battered, clutching at the edge of the seat, Ben cursed through three nerve-wracking hours. Then Old Joe sat down. The wind dropped to a stiff breeze only. The boat ran into smoother water and began to pick up speed. Over on the right a line of tree tops loomed up against the sky. They had entered one of the numerous streams that drain the north shore.

In another half-hour the journey ended. Old Joe crawled the launch into the right bank and warped to a stump. He pointed to a dark smudge in the storm, gave the order to march and fell in behind. A few minutes wading through the snow brought them to a cabin. Old Joe pulled the log away from the door and swung it open.

Five years back Old Joe had built that cabin and blazed a twenty-mile trap line behind it. Since then, though he had passed the clearing often, he had never stopped. Yet the dry interior of the cabin still paid its respects to his characteristic thoroughness.

Over in the corner, by the law of the Raw piled high, a half a cord of dry wood, that Old Joe noted as he built a fire in the rusty sheet-iron stove was of his own piling; built to the wall the bunk, where he stacked the most of the packs from the launch. In silence, then, with his back to the still oil-skinned figure behind the stove, he filled his pipe, and smoked it out before he turned around.

"The nearest man is fifty miles that way," his raised hand pointed north. "There will be two feet of snow, drifted to ten by daybreak. You haven't snow-shoes. You might make it, but I wouldn't advise you to try."

Ben Hale got slowly to his feet. He searched those hard blue eyes for an answer to a terrible question. Old Joe gave it.

"I'll come back for you on April the first."

"But—but, Joe——"

"There's plenty of food here to last till then, if you don't make a hog of yourself," Old Joe rasped on. "But if you find that you're going to be short—there's tons of running meat outside. I'll leave the rifle and a couple of hundred shells by the stump at the landing."

"But for God's sake, Mr. Montgomery! you wouldn't——"

"Sit down!" Old Joe's roar echoed across the little cabin like an explosion. "You're going to take a bath! You're going to spend five months here in this nice clean world with your own dirty little soul!"

Old Joe pulled a package from his pocket and tossed it at Ben's feet. He strode to the door and swung it open.

"And, Hale." There was a new note in his voice as he turned around. "See if you can't get clean before I get back!"

The door slammed shut.

"Joe!"

Ben Hale sprang to the door. A log dropped against it on the outside. He jumped to the window. He lost a precious minute learning that it would take ten minutes to open it. He sprang back for a stick of wood to smash out the glass. Then up through the storm came the soft purr of the launch engine. Ben Hale dropped the stick.

For a full hour Ben Hale sat by the stove, poking in the wood and starting up nervously at every swish of snow outside. Then his roving eyes found the package that Old Joe had tossed at his feet. He picked it up. He ripped away the wrapper and discovered—

A cake of soap.

WHEN Old Joe Montgomery slipped quietly up the little wharf at his cabin the frost—Winter—after many false starts had arrived. The snowstorm had blown into the east; the flying clouds were breaking up into long streamers

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and fading out in the first gray streaks of the dawn, and the mercury in the tube at his door was reaching for the bulb. Old Joe grinned. Today was the twenty-eighth—tomorrow... He wasn't going to get out.

The following morning Old Joe snow-shoed into the village and mailed a letter and a very, very heavy package to St. Paul. Coming back he passed Ben Hale's office, and grinned at the crowd around the door. This was Saturday the twenty-ninth.

The Wool-Sheep Company wanted that ridge. Money was a second consideration, and no risk too great to take. Ben Hale had disappeared; his relatives in Duluth knew nothing of his whereabouts. The Wool-Sheep Company became suspicious.

On the night of November the fifteeenth the little safe in Ben Hale's office was burglarized. The following Thursday night Old Joe Montgomery's cabin was entered, while he was in the village, and thoroughly ransacked. The next night Old Joe himself was held up on the ridge, searched to his socks and allowed to go on home with his groceries.

If they had delayed the hold-up one more day and caught Old Joe coming back from the post-office!

Ben Hale had been missing nearly three months before the Wool-Sheep Company learned that he had last been seen getting into Old Joe Montgomery's launch. They dispatched a messenger forthwith.

"On business, eh?" Old Joe pulled a chair up to the stove for the messenger and glanced up to the coffee can on the shelf. "Well! Just you go back and tell them that it's only two miles out here if they come across the ridge."

The following morning when three strangers crowded into his little cabin, Old Joe filled the coffee pot with water and set it on the stove.

"Where's Ben Hale?"

The tiny man in the big fur coat jerked his cigar out of his mouth and glared at Old Joe.

Old Joe pulled two envelopes out of his pocket—a small white correspondence, and a long manila. He slipped back the long manila.

"That's what I wondered for a long while," he drawled. "I brought Ben down in my launch on the twenty-seventh of October to fix up a little mortgage he held against my property here, and I didn't see hide or hair of him after I put him ashore about midnight that night. Then I got this letter from a relative in St. Paul."

And he passed over the little white envelope.

The tiny man in the big fur coat glanced at the postmark and pulled out the enclosure. He ran his eye down the first page of the letter and stopped near the bottom. A big look of surprise swept into his face. He said—"Listen!" He read:

> I had begun to think that you had entirely forgotten us, Joe, or that you had left the land of the living. Then yesterday I ran into an old schoolmate—Benjamin Hale. He told me that he had been living up there for over a year, and that he knew you quite well in business. He says that you are as good as two men yet, and that——

The tiny man stopped reading. He glanced at his two companions. He made a note of the letter writer and her address and passed the letter back to Old Joe.

"Won't you stop and have a cup of coffee, gentlemen?" Old Joe reached up to the shelf for the coffee can. "I'm not a drinking man or I would offer you something stronger."

The three shook their heads.

"And you say, Mr. Montgomery," the tiny man pulled on his gloves—"you say that you paid off that mortgage?"

Old Joe strode to the door and swung it open.

"That's my business!" he growled. "Mine and Ben Hale's!"

Then The Wool-Sheep Company wasted nearly two thousand dollars searching St. Paul. Old Joe's relative was one of those talk-you-to-death-say-nothing old maids who "failed to ask him his address."

"I just happened to run into Mr. Hale on the street," she explained. "And I haven't seen him since."

It was April the first when they finally got back to Old Joe. That day Old Joe was absent. He'd gone up after Ben Hale.

"A CAKE of soap!"

In the narrow confines of the little cabin the snarl of his own savage voice whipped back on Ben Hale's rotten nerves like the shriek of a rusty hinge. It touched the raw edge of his rage. He swung back his arm.

"The ——!" he cursed, and crashed the

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cake of soap through the window—after Old Joe.

A little later he repented his vicious outburst. The driving snow found the hole in the pane and began to pile up across the foot of the bunk. The wind whistled over the toothed edges of the broken glass and the roaring fire became impotent. He unrolled the blankets and crammed one into the hole. He sat down by the stove again. Daylight found him there, poking in the wood.

The sun was three hours high when he made a pan of coffee, and shuddered at the milkless raw of it. It was noon when he tore the packs off the bunk and rolled up in the blankets. Then with his awakening at night in the rigid atmosphere of the fireless cabin—it came.

For a full minute he lay motionless, his chest rising and falling spasmodically with his bated breath, his bloodshot eyes roving expectantly, his hearing sense strained—waiting. He crawled stealthily out of the bunk and crept to the window.

Down from the cabin the black swollen river stood out between its piled white banks like a great rip in a surplice—deserted. Here and there in the clearing a snow-hidden stump raised a neat mound, like a well kept grave. Around him the forest, as efficient with the trackless leagues of it as a granite wall, hemmed him in, buried him. High in the star-stained cloudless sky—the roof of it all—a crescent moon hung motionless, dead; flooding the solitude with a pale blue ghostly glow. And over all—the silence!

Ben Hale whirled from the window, his long fingers splayed out, his teeth locked, his bloodshot eyes wildly staring. His rotten nerves let go.

He drew a long breath, to the full capacity of his lungs, and spent in it one awful scream. Then he pitched face down on the floor.

Ben Hale's looks had lied, and Old Joe Montgomery had made a mistake.

That was the night Old Joe wrote his letter to St. Paul.

When Ben came back to consciousness, he wouldn't believe it. He had been dreaming. For ages it seemed he had been battling in the darkness with a great heaving snake that purred monotonously like a cat. And his only weapon had been a cake of soap.

Now—there was the hole in the window with the blanket crammed into it. There were the oil-skins that Old Joe had made him wear on the boat, hanging on a peg by the door. There was the big stove in the middle of the room. But . . . .

He was fifty miles from the nearest human brother, yet there, lying in a roll of blankets by the stove was—a woman!

He covered his head and counted ten. She was still there.

"It ain't so!" he snorted.

The woman bounded to her feet. She shed her blankets as a pine sheds snow. She crossed swiftly to his side and searched into his eyes. Then—

"What ain't so?" She smiled.

Ben gasped.

Not being a woman's man, to criticize and classify the gentler sex had been one of his hobbies. He prided himself that he could instantly find a place in his mental catalog for any type or style of beauty. Yet . . . He shut his eyes.

She wasn't tall. She wasn't short. She wasn't fat or thin, a brunette or a blonde. Her eyes weren't black or brown or blue or . . . She wasn't—wasn't . . . One thing only he was positively and absolutely sure and certain of—she was under thirty and over five.

He opened his eyes.

He'd seen the "back" men's girls come into Stowville in the Winter dressed like that—blanket skirts and jackets, with feet encased in moccasins. Yet . . . He shook his mental head. Her hands were not men's hands. Her body didn't sag down from the shoulders. She . . . .

He pushed his hand across his chest and lightly touched the fingers on the blankets.

"You!" he whispered. "You ain't so! I'm dreaming! I'm——"

His returning hand caught his gaze, fixed it. His breath caught with a rasp in his throat. That hand! That wrist! He was a mere skeleton!

The woman's eyes followed his gaze. She nodded understandingly.

"You've been very sick," she told him. "For two whole weeks you've raved and cursed. I had to keep you tied down for days at a time."

Ben's face flamed; he could feel the heat of it.

"What—what did I say?" he stammered.

"I was on the river," the woman smiled on. "Paddling down to Stowville when I heard you scream. It was a good thing I was in a hurry or I wouldn't have been out there at night." She pushed his wasted

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arm under the blankets. "There now. I am going to get you something to eat and you must go right to sleep. You can talk all you wish when you wake up."

Ben settled down into the blankets. A million questions boiled on the tip of his tongue. They could wait. He was quite contented to lie there and . . . .

She wasn't tall. She wasn't short. She wasn't fat or thin, a brunette or a blonde. She wasn't—wasn't . . . .

When he opened his eyes again an odor of boiling beans greeted his nostrils. The girl was sitting at the table. He gasped mentally.

This wonderful girl was eating—*beans!*

He shook his head emphatically.

"Not Beans! Chicken salad, maybe; or at the very limit, cheese. But not *beans! Be* . . . .

And again when the exhaustion of his body released its grip of his brain, he opened his eyes, to find the cabin deserted. The girl was gone!

He struggled to a sitting position. Then sharply through the frosty air outside came the unmistakable ring of an ax.

Ben scratched his head. Old Joe said—and somehow he believed Old Joe—that the nearest man was fifty miles away. Yet . . . .

A great wave of genuine horror swept down on him.

The girl was—was cutting wood!

When the woman swung the door back and came in with an arm piled high with wood, Ben was flat on his back. His eyes were closed. He was thinking.

AN HOUR later Ben ate the food she brought him in silence. All day he lay watching the girl in silence. For the week she made him keep his bed he lay watching the girl in silence. He was thinking. . . Thinking.

When he finally tottered to the table he had quit thinking.

"Where were you born and raised?" he asked.

The girl raised her hand and pointed north.

"There," she smiled. "Fifty miles there."

"And you've lived there all your life?"

"I've never been twenty miles away from there but once before. Once I came down with father and spent two days with an aunt in St. Paul. That was when mother died. Since then I've been living with my uncle; he's a Hudson's Bay factor."

He passed his plate for more bacon and ate half she gave him.

"This—this backwoods!" he sneered. "This God-forsaken section of the Raw—this is no place for you! Why don't you get out of it? Why don't you come down to the city?"

She laid her knife and fork beside her plate. She looked him straight in the eyes.

"You call this the 'Raw.'" She mimicked his sarcasm. "Yes, this is the raw. This is the clean raw meat; the God-remembered, uncooked, clean, raw meat. Up till now this has not been seasoned with gold-dust and fried on a golden pan."

Ben half smiled. She thought he was a timber man.

"Why don't I come down to the city?" The girl got up slowly on her feet. "I'll tell you, stranger. This is clean. And you—you were in the city."

Ben's returning color fled his face. He got up and crossed to the window. He gazed out on the snow. He was thinking again.

Again the silence. In the weeks of his convalescing Ben helped with all of the heaviest of the work that she would allow him to do, but apart from necessary conversation he kept silent. He was thinking . . . Thinking. . . Thinking. . . .

Only once did he question her again, that was on New Year's night. It was the worry of a question demanding an answer that opened his lips.

"You were coming down the river when—" he hesitated—"when you heard me scream. Will you tell me what urgency demanded that you paddle a canoe down a freezing river in the beginning of Winter?"

The girl's smile faded out. She felt of the breast pocket of her jacket.

"There wasn't a man to spare," she smiled again. "My uncle had to send three thousand dollars down to the village by the fifth of the month. I am quite capable. I made the fifty miles down here in twenty hours."

Ben's face showed surprise.

"And you've stayed here with me all this time!" Then he half smiled. "The money didn't get there, did it? You weren't quite capable, were you?"

She returned his half-smile.

"Human life before business," she answered. "That's the law of the Raw and Clean. Yes, I am quite capable."

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Ben got up and went to the window. He was through with thinking.

The next day, the first of February—Ben put the date down in his note book—he was standing down by the girl's snow-buried canoe on the river bank, looking out across the wind swept ice. In six weeks or two months, he told himself, that ice would all be gone. In six weeks or two months that wonderful girl would step into her canoe and . . . .

An hour later Ben stopped pacing backward and forward and dragged his feet into the cabin. The girl was out on the snow crust with the rifle. He stopped by her tiny bit of a mirror hanging by the door and glanced into it.

Ben's face hadn't been shaved since the morning of the day when Old Joe brought him up there. His hair hung over his coat collar. His teeth were yellow.

"Lord!" he growled. "But I'm dirty!"

Then he sprang back as if he had been struck in the face.

"Dirty!" he gasped. "God in heaven, that's it! Old Joe said I was dirty! She said——"

Coming back with a brace of partridge, the girl stopped at the edge of the clearing, watching him and wondering why he dug so frantically into the snow.

She didn't know that it was a cake of soap he found.

Ben Hale's bath began.

Ben spread out the one discarded pack of all that had come up with him and used the razor and the shears to good, if rough effect. He used a bit of sandstone on his teeth till his gums were raw. He trimmed and toiled over his nails till the fingers resembled somewhat the manicured fingers of the business Ben Hale. Then he dug a rut, a very straight and narrow rut, and drove his mind into it. And through it all the girl wondered, and smiled—gladly—behind his back.

Ben took the bit between his cleaned teeth and became the genial boss of the cabin. He cut all the wood and brought it and the water inside. He shoveled the snow from the doorway and the path to the water-hole in the river. He insisted, though he met with strenuous opposition, that the girl take the bunk, and he slept on the floor and kept the fire going. And through it all the girl wondered, and smiled—gladly—behind his back.

And every minute of every hour of every day, Ben battled with an obstinate mind, a mind that had been allowed to wander at will through untilled fields foul with weeds. And he failed. At the end of the first two weeks, he backed himself up into a mental corner and could find no progress. In desperation he jammed his hands into his pockets and found the cake of soap. After that when his thinking wandered into the old ruts he got out that cake of soap and washed his hands and face with it. And he won. And through it all the girl wondered, and smiled—gladly—behind his back.

When the ice went out of the river, Ben Hale's feet stood squarely on the ground, his eyes and lips didn't twitch in his sleep, his mind was a marvel of concentration. His rotten nerves were gone. He was thinking clean.

CAME the day when the girl decided that she could handle the canoe in the river, and he held it steady while she stepped in.

"So you won't come along?" The girl broke a fifteen-minute silence.

Ben shook his head. He had told her nothing of his coming, merely mentioning the fact that a launch would call for him on April first.

"No," he smiled. "I'd like to, but——"

His big hand leaped along the gunwale and closed on the little hand that held the paddle.

"It's costing me more than you'll ever know to refuse!" he whispered hoarsely. "But I've got to keep faith with my partner. That's the law of the Raw and Clean."

He sprang to his feet and whirled up toward the cabin.

The girl dipped her paddle.

Fifty yards down the river the girl turned her head. Ben jerked off his cap. Then low and distinct from the canoe drifted up to him the mating call of the quail.

An hour later Ben got up off the stump at the landing. His face was drawn and white. He'd lived for five months in a cabin in the woods with a wonderful girl—and he'd never asked her name!

OLD Joe Montgomery warped the launch to the stump and strode up to the cabin. It was just as he had found it when he brought Ben Hale up five months before. Over in the corner, by the

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law of the Raw piled high, a half a cord of dry wood; the sheet-iron stove was clear of ashes; the floor was swept clean. By the door lay a roll of blankets, freshly washed, and several small packs. But Ben Hale wasn't there.

Half-way back to the landing Old Joe saw Ben come down the river bank and climb into the launch. He grinned. But he didn't speak when he dropped the packs aboard.

Out over the river a great white gull was circling low for a dead fish. Ben was watching that.

Old Joe took the wheel in silence. The journey back was made in silence. The reckoning would come at the end of the run —in Ben Hale's office.

Old Joe ran in under the fringe of willows across from Ben's office and followed Ben over. Ben sat down at his desk and hoisted his feet. Old Joe didn't see the box of customary cigars slid across to him.

Old Joe pulled two envelopes out of his pocket. One was a long manila, and the other a small white correspondence. He slipped back the small white one.

"Mr. Hale," he drawled. "I borrowed some money from a relative—for that mortgage" And he laid a roll of bills on the desk.

Ben reached for a cigar, hesitated and felt in his pocket for his pipe. He didn't speak.

Old Joe waited a moment. Then he pulled out the big black revolver and toyed with it a moment.

Ben smoked.

Old Joe laid the revolver on the desk and pushed it under Ben's foot, out of his own reach.

Ben's tongue didn't move. His feet did. And his hands. Slowly and deliberately Ben dropped his feet. He pulled the mortgage and the deeds of the ridge from his pocket and sorted out the mortgage. He laid it on the desk. He reached into his side pocket and unwrapping a little package laid a sliver of soap on top of the mortgage. He counted twelve hundred dollars off Old Joe's roll and laid the balance beside the soap. Then he laid the big black revolver on top of the heap and pushed it all across to Old Joe.

"I'm clean," he said.

Old Joe got up on his feet and held out his hand. Ben grabbed it. Eye into eye they searched—and smiled.

Both men filled their pipes.

"Listen, Ben." Old Joe tamped down the tobacco with his thumb. "Three days before that mortgage was due I came up to the village here on foot for supplies. Going back across the ridge I dropped a package of coffee. I got a lot of sand scraping it up, but clean dirt never hurt any man. Then next day I found some of that sand in the coffee grounds in my cup. It looked suspicious. I examined it. A few days later I sent a sample to a relative in St. Paul for assay. Here's the assayist's report." And he passed the big manila envelope across the desk.

Ben picked up the envelope. Then he dropped it again.

"What does he say?" he demanded.

"You own that ridge, Ben, don't you?" Old Joe grinned. "Well the assayist says that those steel-gray granules in that sand is Platinum!"

"What!"

Ben finally got his mouth closed enough to speak. Then he too, grinned.

"So that's the reason you wouldn't sell for fifty dollars an acre?"

Old Joe shook his head.

"It's not on that fifty-six acres," he drawled. "The Wool-Sheep Company—" he grinned—"the only sheep in their whole plan was a goat, Ben. And you were the goat. They wanted that fifty-six acres for plant and wharves for shipping out the ore. And, Ben—I wouldn't have said a word to you; I would have let you sell them the whole ridge if you hadn't got your bath."

Both men relit their pipes.

"Joe." Ben glanced across at the wrecked safe and smiled. "What do you estimate that ridge will be worth to us?"

Old Joe shook his head.

"Not 'us,' lad. That seam is one hundred and seventy-eight feet wide and runs clear across the ridge; and there's two smaller seams beside. I'll bet my launch to a dead fish you can get a million and a half for it without going near it. But none of it is on my fifty-six acres."

Ben got up and stood looking out of the window. Old Joe grinned.

"Sit down!" His roar echoed across the little room like an explosion.

Ben came back and sat down smiling.

"What is it you were working for, lad?" Old Joe questioned. "What are you aiming for in life?"

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"It was a seat on the stock exchange," Ben answered. "But now—" he ran his hand across his roughly cut hair—"now it's the—the winning of, and the building of a home for—for the most wonderful girl in the world."

Old Joe grinned understandingly.

"We're a pair, Ben," he drawled. "I was young once myself and"—and he slipped the big manila envelope back into his pocket—"I've got one little angel. Some day she is going to get married and there are two breeds of men; the clean, and —the other. Ben, for twenty years I've been slaving night and day to own that fifty-six acres down there so that if she gets one of the others, he'll have a home to come to."

Both men slipped their pipes into their pockets.

"To get back to business, Joe." Ben bent forward. "If we decide to work that ridge, how are we going to get out the ore?"

"Not 'we,' lad." Old Joe shook his head. "You are going to take it out just as the company intended taking it out."

"No!" Ben was very emphatic. "There will never be a cent's worth of ore leave that ridge if it has to cross your little girl's home!'

Old Joe got up on his feet, and his face was very grave.

"Listen, Ben," he said evenly. "Last night I took my little angel up on my knee and talked to her like I used to when she was a little baby. And, Ben, I haven't the least doubt that the man she'll marry will be clean. She says he's clean. And, Ben, she ought to know. She lived in a cabin in the Raw and Clean all Winter with him while he took his bath."

IT WAS the first of April outside Ben Hale's little office in the village of Stowville. Ben had been to the barber shop and come back. The Wool-Sheep Company had called, and gone away again with the tiny man—tinier still without his big fur coat—calling down on Ben's head all the curses of the gods. Now Ben sat at his desk. His face was very grave.

"That twelve hundred dollars that I peeled off Old Joe's roll—" he picked up the money—"that was part of that three thousand that took her out in a canoe on a freezing river at the beginning of Winter." He stopped and sealed the bills up in a big manila envelope. "And now it's out of circulation till the crack of doom!"

He got up and walked to the window, gazing down the shore line toward a little cabin on fifty-six acres of rock-piles and brush. And this is what he said:

"She isn't tall. She isn't short. She isn't a blonde or a brunette. She isn't—isn't— she's Old Joe's little angel. And Old Joe's little angel won't ever—ever—ever—ever eat any more beans!"

A broad grin spread over his clean healthy face.

"And won't I tease her!" he laughed. "I'll call her *Soap!*"

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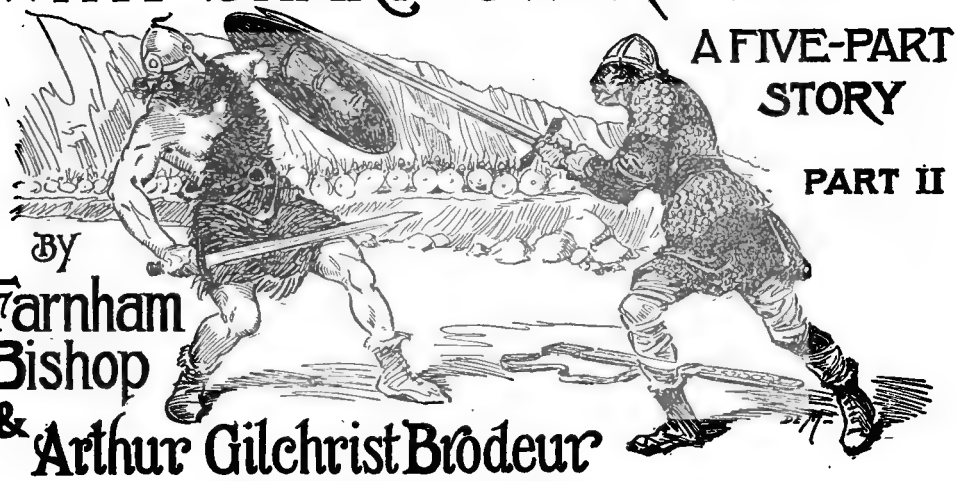
WITH SHARP SWORD-EDGES

A FIVE-PART STORY

PART II



By
Farnham Bishop
& Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur

Author of "Malena," "In the Grip of the Minotaur," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

KING SIGURD, seated at an old Norse banquet table beside his fair foster-daughter, Gunnhild, and her brother Gunnarr, was addressing his warriors:

"When Halfdan rose to be king I recognized him as lawful sovereign of all Norway and I did homage to him for my little land of Ringariki. The petty kings have either submitted to him or been put down. Men, I bid you drink to Halfdan, king of a great and new Norway."

At this moment the door opened and Haki, the berserk, entered, evil joy written on his outlaw face.

"That toast is unlucky," he exclaimed. "Halfdan is dead!"

After the astonished warriors had left the hall, Haki slyly unburdened himself to Sigurd and Gunnhild: "It will be a merry day for the little kings, now that the old bear rules no more."

"The old bear has left a cub behind, in his son Harald," remarked Sigurd significantly.

"If you desert Harald and make terms with the Five Kings I can promise you safety and honor," suggested Haki.

Sigurd pretended to be sympathetic and drew gradually from Haki the plans of the conspiring little kings of Norway. At length the outlaw threw light upon the death of Halfdan:

"Gandalf of Vingulmark asked me if I could get rid of Halfdan. It was I who found the way." Then he went on: "This girl here—" nodding to Gunnhild—"has taken my fancy. Give her to me to be my wife—that shall be the payment for your life."

Gunnhild, cheeks ablaze, flashed back:

"Not even to save King Harald's life would I marry you, traitor and king-slayer."

"You have had your answer," said Sigurd. "Now go before I slay you."

Clearly, Haki would send a messenger to warn Gandalf and the other Five Kings that Sigurd remained loyal to Harald; also, Haki was the only one who knew the whereabouts of the young king's army at that moment. The berserk's messenger must be stopped at all hazards. It was Gunnhild who insisted upon doing this single-handed. She was swift of foot, knew the trail and was sure of aim in throwing the spear.

She came upon the messenger far out in the snow-covered hills. He was an outlaw, a wild beast such as every honest man killed without compunction. Her spear flew straight and he fell dead.

Gunnhild ran to shelter as she heard a troop of warriors approaching. Then seeing that it was Harald and his army, who had stopped, puzzled, before the dead man, she stepped out and said:

"I slew the man and for your sake, my king!"

Gunnhild's tall figure was swathed in heavy trousers and her head was well covered. Naturally enough the king mistook her for a man. Nor did she disillusion him. He was a lad of only twenty, but she saw that he would make a man as great as his father had been.

Gunnhild told of Haki's talk with her foster-father, upon which the young monarch turned to his uncle and directed:

"Guthorm, we will march at once upon my father's murderers." Then, turning to Gunnhild: "Nor will I forget you, boy. When I come to Sigurd's hall you shall have, as gift, my sword. Then will I take in return your spear."

Several days after this, the disloyal Five Kings were holding a meeting in the hall of the arch-traitor Gandalf—planning the destruction of Harald, and each squabbling with the other over the allotment of the lands of Norway when this should come about. Suddenly came a surging peal outside:

"Harald! Harald! Vengeance for Halfdan!"

The hall had been set afire and the panic-stricken

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conspirators were surrounded by Harald's warriors. Four of the Five Kings were killed. But Gandalf and the outlaw Haki escaped to the forests.

Harald and his victorious warriors marched to the hall of the hospitable Sigurd, where a banquet was waiting. Gunnhild was to sit beside the king and opposite Hornklofi, an Irish bard whose haunting melodies were famous throughout the land. Gunnhild did not appear until all were seated, then when she was introduced to the king, the young monarch's face was frozen in sheer wonder at the loveliness of her.

"I trust King Harald will remain here for some time in the peace and contentment he has won," was her greeting.

"My work is not yet done," he answered. "Two of the traitors escaped and I can not rest until they are hanged." Then turning to Sigurd: "You and your foster-daughter must come with us. Such a maid was never born to spend her days with none to pay her homage but your house-carles."

"I wonder," asked Gunnhild, "whether I should find in Harald's royal hall any one who would offer fiercer homage than I have already received."

"Who is this bold admirer?" asked the king, frowning.

When she told of Haki's marriage proposal, King Harald leaped to his feet exclaiming:

"For that piece of insolence, he shall be flayed alive instead of hanged!"

THIS was not what Gunnhild wanted. Herself a king's daughter, she feared Harald no more than any other man, and spoke bluntly what was in her mind.

"That is not kingly," she said.

Guthorm choked over his mead, and tried to look innocent when the king's hot eyes flashed at him. Sigurd reached under the table with his foot, but missed Gunnhild and trod on the toes of Hornklofi, who darted a look of amusement at him. The skald scented trouble, and the Celt in him rejoiced in the prospect.

"Why not?" Harald demanded of the girl, with a touch of fierceness.

"Because," came the swift retort, "he is a brave man, for all his wickedness. His courage requires you to give him a brave man's death. I can think of no nobler deed than for you to slay him, man to man, with your own hand."

"Gunnhild!" cried her foster-father. "You are speaking to the king, to whom you owe reverence."

Harald, now once for all under the girl's influence, answered for her.

"She is right, Sigurd," he declared. "It is because she has reverence for the king that she speaks as she does. She would have the king act royally; and certainly courage and the recognition of courage are qualities a king should show. Gunnhild, I swear to you that I will give Haki no other death but that of the sword. Are you content with me?"

"Norway is content with you, my king," was her proud reply.

This put Harald in high spirits. He reverted to the subject of the rebellion, and told how he had ambushed and beaten the Five Kings.

"It was a noble battle," he exulted. "Gandalf's fellows fled at the first onset, and were easily cut down by my men in hiding. But Haki and his berserks fought like fiends. By Thor! If I had five hundred such men, I could conquer all the land from here to Denmark. Guthorm, you are, as your name implies, an old war-serpent, but I will wager you never saw such men."

"They lapped their shields together, Sigurd, and stood shoulder to shoulder, slashing as thick as Winter storm. When their rascal of a chief joined them, they formed and pivoted about him in a fashion I never heard of before. Guthorm, has that method of fighting been used in the North by any other?"

"Often," the old soldier answered. "Look at Sigurd smile, my nephew. His grandfather, Ragnarr Lodbrok, used such tactics, and no living man could withstand him in his day."

"Ragnarr Lodbrok?" the king echoed. "I have heard old songs of him. You know them all, Hornklofi; sing us one."

At the first mention of battle, the little flashes of light and shadow had renewed their chase up and down the skald's features. His flaming eyes had sought about the chamber, resting now on the mail hung on the walls, now on the banners dangling from the roof-beams, as if seeking inspiration there. Now, at the king's command, he sprang to his feet, threw back the long hair which framed his face, and burst into a rapid, rhythmic chant, beating time with his hands and his swaying shoulders.

He sang of the wondrous adventures and daring deeds of that prince of pirates, that glorious sea-king, Ragnarr Lodbrok, of "Tar-Breeks," the Norwegian who rose to be ruler of Denmark, swept the Northern

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shores with his swift galleys, roved the Baltic and the North Sea, and made his name a terror in the isles of Britain. Of desperate deeds in far-off Russia he chanted, of pillage among the Wends, of the siege of Paris, and the plunder of German coasts.

His surging measures were bright with the flare and clash of swords, red and heady with singing of wine and blood, flushed with the splendor of ravished gold and glowing gems. Of the valkyrs he sang, and the deathless halls of Odin, prepared for dauntless heroes.

And, as he came to the tale of Ragnarr's fatal battle with Ælla, the Anglian king, he cast aside his own song, and swept into the savage, pulsing rhythm of Ragnarr's death-hymn, which the wild viking made with his own lips as he lay bound in a Northumbrian prison, writhing under the terrible tortures of the serpents which infested it. Now he neared the end; and the verses beat from his lips in Ragnarr's last exultant words:

We hewed with sharp sword-edges! 'Tis sure that no man fleeth
The doom the Norns lay on him; our destiny we follow.
I never dreamed, when joyous I drove the wave-borne long ship
Through Scotland's firths, where corpse-flesh I fed to famished eagles,
That I my life should one day lay down in Ælla's snake-pit.

We hewed with sharp sword-edges! My heart in gladness leaped
To think that Valhalla's guest-hall is garnished for my coming.
Soon shall we drink right blithely beer from the god's curved mead horns!
At Odin's glorious banquets the hero grieveth never,
Ne'er mourns his death; no coward I come to greet All-Father.

We hewed with sharp sword-edges! How swift my sons would hasten,
My Aslaug's sons, their bright brands waking bitter hatred,
If they but knew how Aella with gnawing serpents slays me!
I chose, my sons to mother, a maid of stock surpassing,
That they, like her, should ever prevail in heart o'er all men.

We hewed with sharp sword-edges! Close to its end life ebbeth—
Grimly the adder's venom inhabiteth the heart's house!
I ask but this: that Odin may rest his wrath on Ælla!
May swell my sons with fury to know their sire oppressed
With bitter pangs; and never may the bold youths rest revengeless!

We hewed with bright sword-edges! Fifty and one great battles
I've won, oh God of Weapons! and knew no warrior stronger.
Least of all things in life I looked to find my master.
But let King Ælla triumph! Death troubleth not a hero.

I, Ragnarr, cease from singing! The spear-maids' home invite me,
Whom from the Hall of Asgard, Odin had sent to find me.
Gladly I'll quaff the ale-draught in the Æsir's kingly guest-seat.
Past is the space of breathing! Life flies! Laughing, I perish!'

As the tones of the singer died away, a roar of applause burst from the assembled warriors on the benches. Sigurd leaped from his seat, stripped the heavy rings of gold from each arm, and threw them ringing down upon the table in front of Hornklofi.

"The singer's meed!" he cried. "And never was gold more fairly won! For this tribute to my house I thank you, Hornklofi; and you too, my king, I thank from a full heart! My cup of honor is full."

Harald's face, still rapt with the thrilling cadences, contended between joy in the echoes of battle and a greater joy in the contemplation of Gunnhild's excited happiness. Like the valkyrs who soared about Ragnarr's dungeon-walls, she felt the stern love of heroism surge in her veins; her features were transfused with the glory of the warrior's death. Slowly, the color receded from her flushed face; slowly, her spirits returned to the world about her.

SIGURD gratefully clasped his lord's hand, and led him to the more exalted of the two high-seats.

"And now, my king," he besought, "take this throne of honor. Give me your sword-hilt, that I may swear to you the loyal faith I swore to your father, Halfdan, who is now in Valhalla, and whom, perhaps, my grandsire Ragnarr welcomed to the hall of the Gods!"

Harald sat down, and did as his host requested. Sigurd took the sword in his right hand, raised it to his lips, and there, in his own house, swore undying faith to Harald and to his house forever.

"And you too, Gunnhild!" he cried. "Come hither, daughter of Erik, and

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rightful queen of Hordaland! Swear on this sword, as I have sworn; swear fealty to Harald for yourself and for your people!"

And Gunnhild, dispossessed as she was, swore for herself and for Hordaland.

"Are you Erik's daughter?" Harald exclaimed. "Then I too make my oath, and I call on you all to witness it, that within the year I will conquer your kingdom back for you, hang the coward Eysteinn on the highest gallows in Norway, and reinstate you in your realm!"

Once more the hall rang with the deep-toned shouts of the warriors; tears of joy and pride came into Gunnhild's eyes. She lifted the hand of Harald to her lips, and kissed it gratefully.

But the king, once enthroned, felt it incumbent on him to show more acts of royal condescension, and recalled a matter which had slipped from his mind.

"Sigurd," he said, "I have already thanked you for the good turn you did me in revealing the treachery of the Five Kings, and in sending a man to stop Haki's messenger. I desire now to thank that man; and it is with grateful pride that I recognize the good-will which prompted you to dispatch your foster-son on that errand. Lead the lad to me! I wish to reward him."

Now Sigurd, remembering the trick Gunnhild wished him to play, felt very uneasy indeed; but on looking at her imploringly, he caught a mischievous glance that convinced him that it was in vain to ask to be let off. He sighed, therefore, and led young Gunnarr to the steps of the dais.

"No, not that one!" Harald cried, with some impatience. "The other lad! And now I think of it, I have not seen him here tonight. Fetch him, Sigurd."

"I beg your pardon, my lord," Sigurd stammered. "This is my foster-son. I have no other."

"But, body of my father!" swore Harald. "I say this is not he. Do you not know the man you sent? It was a tall fellow, bigger every way than this one, with the voice of a woman, but a man's arms. Thor! How he sent his spear through that berserk, mail and all!"

"This lad, and none other, is my foster-son," his host insisted.

Harald sprang to his feet, his face dark with anger.

"Then the dog lied!" he roared. "Lied to me, Harald the King! He told me, himself, he was your foster-son, and I promised him a rich gift. He had the insolence to reject my gold ring, and demanded a better gift. Even that I promised him; but now I know he has lied to me, he gets nothing. He will be lucky to escape without a beating, and he owes his safety to the chance that he served me well. Now send for him, and have him here at once!"

Sigurd shrugged his shoulders. The game had become too exciting for his taste. Nonetheless, he played it through.

"Go, Gunnhild," he commanded, "fetch the messenger here."

Gunnhild left the hall. Soon she returned, clothed as she had been for the journey a week ago, in a man's trousers, with a heavy cloak wrapped about her body and swathing her face to the eyes. Her fur cap muffled her head and ears; and in her hand she carried the spear which had slain the berserk. She stood about four paces from the throne, taking care to keep her face out of the torchlight.

"Well, fellow!" the king sternly addressed her. "You told me you were Sigurd's foster-son. That is false. Say now who you are, and say truthfully, if it is to go well with you!"

"With your favor, oh King," Gunnhild replied, "I said not that I was Sigurd's foster-son, but that he is my foster father."

"By the holy eye of Odin!" gasped the king. "Is it not the same answer, you double speaker?"

"It is not, my lord."

And Gunnhild cast aside her cloak, shook her splendid braided hair over her bosom, and stepped into the light.

For a full minute Harald stood dumfounded; then he strode down from the dais, seized both her hands in his, and led her to the table where the others stood.

"You men of Norway!" he cried, in tones that rang through the great hall and re-echoed from the rafters. "Behold here a woman who has done the deed of a man! Behold a queen who has put the deeds of a king to shame! Oh Gunnhild, daughter of Erik, of such maids as you were the old tales of the fathers wrought! Of such as you were the valkyrs, the shield-maids of the gods! Now give me your spear, that I may fulfil my promise to you!"

She obeyed; and, kneeling at her feet, Harald the king unbelted his gold-adorned

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scabbard and bound his own sword to her girdle.

"Honor to the Queen of Hordaland!" he cried. "Honor and reverence to the noblest woman in Norway!"

And the acclamations of the warriors sealed the words of the king.

Hornklofi, rising from his reverence, turned his quizzical eyes, now shining with repressed mischief, to Guthorm.

"Do you not see great tokens in this thing?" he asked.

"How do you mean?"

"The grandson of Ragnarr Lodbrok, mark you, swears homage to Harald on the king's sword. Then Harald gives that sword to a maiden. Look at the maiden's face, my shrewd soldier; and then say if his act does not transfer our allegiance to her?"

"Yet I do not see."

"The gods have made you blind. You and I, yes, all of us, will some day do homage to this girl in the king's hall. And I think she will be queen over a wider realm than you or I have yet known."

CHAPTER VII

THORA THE FAIR

HAKI lifted the hanging, looked out upon a white opacity of swirling snow, and dropped the thick curtain again with a fervent curse. Twice he strode the length of the room; then, in a hot fury, tore the bandage from his nose and hurled it to the floor.

"May Surt and all his fiends run off with this weather, and with your bandage too!" he roared. "The one keeps me indoors when I should be fleeing for my life, and the other gets into my eyes and maddens me!"

The girl by the fire looked up at him reproachfully, heaved a patient little sigh, laid aside the cushion she was embroidering, and rose slowly to her feet.

"Now your nose is bleeding again," she rebuked him. "As for the weather, you know well that you can not go ten furlongs from the house without getting lost in the snow, so you must wait till it is over."

The berserk snorted furiously.

"Do you wish me to stay here until it pleases Harald to come and take me?"

The girl stooped to pick up the cast-off bandage; and in doing so, managed to drop her comb, so that her wonderful golden hair fell rippling all about her. Then shaking it back, she walked over to the infuriated Haki, stroked his rough cheek with her soft white hand, and strove to pull the ugly head down toward her lovely one. After a little his savage features relaxed into an unwilling smile; he bent down obediently, and she fastened the bandage in its place again.

"You beautiful little witch!" he muttered, in grudging admiration. "I little thought, Thora, when I stole you from your brother, that I would care for you half so long."

A beautiful little witch she was, with her glorious hair, her great sea-blue eyes, her dainty figure, and her coaxing ways.

"Nor am I sure that you do care for me, Haki," she replied. "I am good to look upon, and so you let me stay with you while it pleases you, but you do not trust me as you used to."

"Why do you say that, little bird?"

"You used to tell me all your hopes and plans, and you always asked my advice before you undertook dangerous and important things. Now you tell me nothing. Ah well, you are the loser by it. If you had taken me into your confidence you would not be a beaten, hunted man now."

Haki scowled.

"How so, little fool?" he asked.

"Because I would never have consented to so foolish an undertaking. Now that it is all over, and the Five Kings are reduced to one, you come back to me to be patched up, and graciously tell me what you have been doing. The Five Kings were no fit allies for you: they were foolish, quarrelsome men, too jealous of one another to unite at the right time and strike quickly.

"Then you underestimated Harald, and left the killing of him to others, when you should have done it yourself. You let him surprise you when you should have surprised him. If you had joined your men to Thor's, and led the attack in person, Harald would be dead now, for there are no better men in Norway than your berserks.

"But your great mistake was in your choice of allies; they were poor men at best, and now that most of them are dead, you are alone, within reach of Harald's arm. You should have gone to Thrandheim, to my brother Gipull of Sparabu. He and the other Thrandheim Kings would have been as ready as these fools of the South to join you in an attack on the house of Halfdan; besides, they are much stronger than the

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Five Kings, they trust one another and act together, and if defeated, could offer you a safe refuge far from Harald's reach."

Haki laughed mockingly.

"Yes, your brother would welcome me, would he not? Why, girl, he has never forgiven me for running off with you and bringing his royal name to shame. An ax would have been the only greeting he would have given me. But come, never say I do not ask your advice, for I ask it now. What am I to do? I must get out of here as soon as this accursed snow ceases, of course; but what then? I must have new allies to replace the dead; where shall I find them?"

"I have told you already," Thora answered. "You must go to my brother."

"But he hates me. How shall I win him over?"

Thora looked long and earnestly at him, with anxious eyes.

"There is but one way," she said. "You must promise him to make me your wife."

The berserk pondered, frowning. He did not want to marry Thora at all, pretty little thing that she was. She still fascinated him more than he admitted to himself; but his heart, such as it was, was Gunnhild's. Even Gunnhild he could not love with the selfless devotion of a purer heart; but her beauty stirred him in every sense, and her splendid, fierce courage had won from him an admiration which vitalized his love for her.

It was clear enough, though, that Sigurd would never listen to his proposals; and if a promise of marriage could win over Thora's powerful brother and his still more powerful allies, the Thrandheim Kings, it might be worth while to give that promise—even to keep it.

As he resolved in his mind the failure of his schemes, and speculated on the chance of their reconstruction, his active brain leaped to a splendid conclusion. He stroked the smooth gold of Thora's hair, and bending down, kissed her on the lips.

"It is a wise little head," he answered. "Now listen, my Thora; I will tell you all that has been in my thoughts these many months."

"You thought I was playing Gandalf's game and taking his pay, did you not? Well, so I was, until he and the other kings who are dead had played mine. When Harald should be slain, and I made Earl of Agdir, it was my purpose to set the Five Kings against one another until, one by one, they should kill one another off. I would have stayed by Gandalf till the last; then, when he alone should be left, I would have struck at him, swiftly, cunningly as I struck at Halfdan."

"Then there would have been none in all South Norway to oppose me, and I should have been its king. Little by little I would have extended my power, till I could threaten even Thrandheim; and at last the Thrandheim Kings also must have fallen before me. It was my ambition, little bird, to become king of all Norway."

Thora gazed up at him, her eyes wide with admiration.

"It is not yet too late," she whispered softly.

"True, thanks to your wise little head. I will put your plan to the proof, sweetheart; but not just now. First I must learn several things: how your brother might listen to the project of a marriage between you and me; whether he will make alliance with me now that Harald has overcome the Five Kings.

"To be in a position to approach him, I must win more men to my banner; scarce thirty are left to me after that accursed battle. He must not think that I am poor and powerless, or he will not listen to me. And first of all, I must go into hiding till I can find out what Harald means to do."

Thora hung her head, thinking hard.

"I have it," she announced at last. "As soon as the snow stops, lead your men swiftly to your old hiding-place in Borghus, just over the Swedish border. I will go alone to Westfold—no one knows me there, for I have scarcely been beyond these doors—and find some means to learn Harald's plans. When I know them, I will hasten back to you.

"If Harald means to come no farther North than this, so that the way is clear, we can get reinforcements among the Swedes, and go at once to Thrandheim. There you will ask my brother to consent to our marriage. He always loved me, that thick-headed Gipull, and I can twist him 'round my fingers. Once I am your wife, I can easily persuade him to lend us men, gold, and influence. Then you shall use the men of Thrandheim to make you king of all Norway."

Haki swung her off her feet and held her high in the air.

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"And you shall be my queen!" he cried.

He kissed her thrice before he set her down, and left the room to finish preparations for the flight that would begin with the disappearance of the storm.

"Queen you shall be, little schemer," he chuckled to himself; "but a king may have more than one wife, and the other shall be Gunnhild!"

CHAPTER VIII

NORWAY SPEAKS

WHIRLING, strangling, smothering, the snow blew from the bleak northeast. The little world of Ringariki was buried in it, hidden as completely by the blinding masses as if some giant hand had picked it swiftly up and transported it beyond the sea. Lake and plain were blended in one expanse of whiteness, the drifts deep as the height of a man, and the unseen sky pouring down fresh depths unceasingly.

Not till afternoon of the third day did the storm clear away and the sun come out for a few hours of gleaming gray light, light that reflected dazzlingly, glimmering from a sea of snow as from a myriad moon-kissed spear-points. The first stars of the evening shone down on the royal host, advancing on snow-shoes to meet the king. Karuson's heritage was added to Harald's realm.

With a few exceptions, the wounded were still unable to march, and arrangements had to be made to leave them with Sigurd when Harald should depart for Tunsberg. About thirty-five were to stay behind; half-a-dozen who had suffered but slightly would leave with Harald; nine or ten rested in graves excavated with fire and shovels in the frozen earth.

Of those who had faced Haki's berserks, threescore had been buried, or carried to Hadeland in the arms of their comrades. Few of these would ever fight again. The rest of the expedition, not quite two hundred men, were housed and fed by Sigurd's peasants until Harald should be ready to lead them south.

The days of storm passed dully enough for Guthorm, whose thoughts dwelt anxiously on the state of affairs in Westfold. The wary old soldier grudged every moment of forced inaction, and looked forward anxiously to the return of fair weather.

At least two people, however, were content. Hornklofi found a quiet amusement in the growing attachment of Harald to Gunnhild, and seemed to find in it matter for speculation of an interesting sort. As for Harald himself, nothing would have pleased him better than to be imprisoned, by an eternal succession of snows, in the same house with Gunnhild. He never seemed to ask himself whither this friendship was tending, but gave himself over unreservedly to the enjoyment of it.

As often and as long as circumstances allowed he was wherever Gunnhild was. If she lingered in the hall after meals, he lingered too; if she went out to the stables to feed and groom her black horse, he followed her; when she went to her household duties in the bower, he found some reason for visiting the bower. To speak truth, she did not make it hard for him to see her, but took as great pleasure in his company as he in hers.

For hours together, as she sat over her spinning, they talked with the eager enthusiasm of the young and high-spirited. Gunnhild's upbringing, thanks to the care of Sigurd Stag, had been such as few women of her time could boast. In addition to her knowledge of the care of a household, she possessed skill in all those things which went to make up the education of a man. She could use bow and sword as well as needle and distaff; she knew by heart the old law-codes by which her father's realm and the districts about it were governed.

She knew the intricate rules of poetry, and could compose like any skald. Old songs and legends she knew by hundreds, and had stored her memory with the traditions, handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth, which formed the only history of the time. She rode and hunted and swam as well as most men, and was familiar with the most technical terms of falconry.

Such an interest in these things had she shown from her childhood, that her foster-father had taken her into his council, and she discussed questions of policy and planned campaigns with men whose white heads and wrinkled faces bore the marks of many years' experience. Sigurd was wont to say that Gunnhild was king in Ringariki, and he but her right hand. Be this as it may, it is certain that he never thought of embarking upon a serious enterprise without consulting her.

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Harald never wearied of listening to her talk. He himself said little; but, as his ears followed her every word, his eyes continually rested on her face. There was a kind of worshiping quality about his attention to her, a reverence for her opinions and a deference to her wishes, which his imperious youth had rarely accorded to any one else—certainly not to Guthorm, who wondered impatiently how he was ever to persuade his nephew to return home.

Gunnhild was perfectly aware of all this, and perhaps as much amused by it as Hornklofi. But it had this difference for her, that underneath her amusement the matter was becoming terribly serious to her, and she knew it. Let the king listen to her all he would, she recognized in him a great and elemental strength, which might some day be used for incalculable good, or which might burst loose like an earthquake and rend the world.

She felt that he would hear all she or any one might say, and then go straight to his own purposes. This strength of his drew her own stern spirit to him irresistibly, just as his fine, fearless face and eyes of a young lion drew her eyes. She saw clearly enough that she was rapidly losing herself in the sweep of a great love, and was troubled lest her yielding to this love might destroy her power to guide and direct his turbulent strength into wise and good channels.

It was not until the last evening of his stay that she felt sufficiently confident of her ascendency over him to touch on the matters that were near her heart. Harald himself made the opportunity.

Sigurd Stag had prepared a splendid feast as a final honor to the king before his departure; but Harald rose from the table early, alleging that he must talk with Gunnhild concerning her kingdom of Hordaland, which he intended to re-conquer for her. His rising gave the signal for the banquet to break up, and the others went to their chambers, leaving Harald and Gunnhild alone by the great fire.

When the room was empty, he sat down beside her on the bench, and took her hand. Seeing clearly what was coming, Gunnhild strove to forestall it. She began to ask him about his plans for the coming campaign against Gandalf, and warned him against leaving the water-gate of Oslo Fjord open to an attack from the rear.

"You must build ships," she said. "It is of no avail to invade Vingulmark from the north so long as you leave the sea open to him. He will take to his galleys, raid your coasts and burn your towns while you are still marching around the long elbow of the fjord; and when you have reached the coasts again, he need only sail merrily back across the fjord to be safe at home. Plunder his lands as you will, he will plunder your shores as thoroughly."

"You are a wise woman," he replied. "Great as my father was, he never had the foresight to build a fleet. Guthorm has not thought of it either, nor I, until you spoke of it. I will build the greatest fleet that was ever seen in Norway."

"Not only that," she told him, "but you must find some way of keeping your warriors together. One king after another has risen to greatness in this land, only to fall when his treasure gave out, and he had no more to pay his men. When soldiers desert, the enemy sees his opportunity."

"That is a harder matter. Treasure may be won in two ways: by trade, and by capture. I do not wish to be a thief or a pirate, and I have no inclination to be a merchant-king, like Sorli of the Scales. My time is needed at home, establishing peace and making laws."

GUNNHILD felt that her opportunity had come.

"You speak like a king indeed," she answered. "These are evil times into which we are born, Harald, and it is the duty of a man to make them better. In all Norway there is not a space of ten miles where a man may walk alone, with a silver ring on his finger, without being slain and plundered. A maid may not go about safely outside her own estate, and a poor woman is not secure in her own house.

"Berserks and outlaws infest the land, killing and oppressing the weak, and none lifts a finger to stop them. The country is filled with petty kings, each jealous of the others, and scheming and plotting each to overthrow his neighbor and take his lands. You know the proverb:

> Betimes must he rise who would have the life or lands of another;
> The sleeping wolf seldom gets the ham, or a slothful man the spoil.

Man-slaying and pillage form the chief occupation of the people.

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"These things must stop. Your father tried to stop them in his own realm, and while he lived things were better than they had been before. Now the lawless think their chance has come again. But unless I am much mistaken in you, Harald, you will put down lawlessness with a firm hand, and will refuse to endure the oppression of your subject."

All this while he had held her hand in his, and now gripped it tightly.

"You give me good counsel, Gunnhild," he said eagerly. "In all my realm there is no other so wise as you, none so great of heart. Whatever you tell me I will do, for it will be as right and true as if it came from the lips of Odin."

She looked steadily into his eyes, and the directness of her gaze held him aloof from her.

"Peace and good laws, Harald, as you yourself have said. But first you must win more lands, for it will avail little if your kingdom is peaceful and prosperous within, but subject to perpetual attack from without. You must make yourself king over a wider realm than Halfdan ever possessed."

No doubt of his power to do this so much as entered her mind; nor, indeed, did it enter his own.

"I will," he assured her. "I will rule from Westfold to the Dales, from Agdir to Sweden."

"That is not enough," she answered, a little hardness creeping into her voice. "You must leave no chance for a more powerful than yourself to arise. Remember, the land looks to you for its welfare; it has no other to look to. If you abandon your people, they are lost once more in the dark night of rapine and slaughter."

Harald rose, and took two or three turns about the fire; then, striding swiftly to her, put both hands on her shoulders and raised her to her feet. Once more she looked at him with those dark, penetrating eyes of hers; but they had lost their power to hold him off. He drew her to him, and held her in his arms.

"All these things I will do," he said, in a voice that was low, but almost fierce. "I will be a king greater and juster than this land has ever known. Listen, Gunnhild, my beloved. Just before my birth, my mother dreamed that she was walking in her garden, and found a thorn caught in her gown. She drew it out; but as she held it in her hand, it grew to a great tree, and struck its roots deep into the earth. Its top towered until it reached the very heavens, and became green as the grass; the trunk was red like blood, and the branches white as snow.

"This dream was interpreted to mean that I, her son who should be born, would rule over greater lands than my father ever held, that much blood would be spilt in the winning of them, but that when they were mine, they would flourish and prosper under my rule. I never gave much thought to the dream, but you have brought it back to my mind.

"Now hear me. You have shown me the way to its fulfilment, and to a great destiny. This destiny is also yours, and I will not have it unless I can share it with you. You know I love you, Gunnhild; I need not tell you how much, for you have guessed it already. I love you more than I hate Gandalf; I love you more than I fear the gods. With you to counsel me, you to aid me, there is nothing I can not do.

"Gunnhild, dearer to me than Gudrun was to Sigurd the Volsung, dearer than the Spring sun to the frozen earth, dearer than Valhalla to the dying hero, fairest and greatest of women! You shall be my wife, my queen; and together we shall rule over a strong and a happy people!"

Without attempting to withdraw herself from his clasp, Gunnhild placed both hands on his cheeks, and held his head close to hers, so that she could look deep into his eyes. Her own were sad, but with a strange sadness which was part chagrin, part pity, and wholly sorrow.

"Ah, Harald," she reproached him, "how weakly, how miserably, you have read your mother's dream! The top of the tree she saw reached to the heavens themselves, and do you think the branches covered only a few paltry districts? You, great Halfdan's greater son, would content yourself with a realm only 'greater than his!' Harald, out of the love I bear you, which is indeed greater than yours for me, or I should not have to say this—out of the love I bear you, I refuse your love until you are more worthy to offer it to me."

Her eyes burning into his, her voice ringing with emotion, she drove every word into his heart.

"I tell you, Harald, I would not marry a

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man who sees no higher end than this. I am too proud to mate with a man who is satisfied to be king of the part when he might have the whole. I will call no petty kinglet husband. If you would win me, go forth and take into your hand not this and that poor district, but all of Norway!

"When you have conquered all this great land, and established yourself in it as firmly as ever Gorm the Old established himself in Denmark, or Erik in Sweden, then return to me, and I will be your wife. I have spoken!"

Harald loosed her, and cried, with a burning face:

"Not you alone, but Norway has spoken through your lips! Norway, crying aloud for unity and strength and peace! I will obey her words and yours. I swear to you, Gunnhild, I will leave this house as soon as the sun rises tomorrow, and I will not return until I am king of all Norway! Until that time comes, I will touch neither razor to my cheeks nor shears to my hair, but will go unshorn to keep my vow in memory! And then, hold yourself in readiness, for I will come to take you!"

"Well said, my king!" cried a hearty voice from the doorway, and Guthorm stood before them, his mail flashing in the firelight. "Well said! And remember, it is a king's deed to keep a king's word!"

CHAPTER IX

THE RED ARROW

WELL after nightfall of the third day, the weary and footsore host ended its forced march at the stockade of the king's hall at Tunsberg. Within arrow-flight of the massive timbered gate, they were halted by the guard, fifty full-armed men standing each with one foot back and bows drawn to the ear.

"Halt, in the name of Halfdan the King!" challenged the officer in command, a thick-set swordsman, raucous of voice.

And Guthorm answered:

"Halfdan is dead. Here is Harald his son, come to take his heritage."

And in proof, Harald himself stepped forward, alone, to meet the officer. The guardsman waited silently till the young king stood within five paces of him; then:

"Down arms!" he cried, "It is Harald, and he is king!"

The bows unbent; fifty arrows were thrust back into their quivers, and the warriors of the guard raised their voices in a ringing shout of welcome. The cheer brought out the pikemen of the royal body-guard from their warm quarters inside the enclosure, a full dozen of them carrying pine torches that flared against the black dark and gleamed redly on the weapons.

These men, picked for size, strength, and skill in arms from all Westfold, were privileged characters. With cries of joy, they swarmed about their young ruler, beat him lustily across the back with their great palms, shook his hands vehemently, and at last raised him to their shoulders, throned him on a shield, and bore him in triumph into the hall of his fathers.

Their enthusiastic loyalty won never a smile from Harald. His eyes lighted with a fierce gleam, as his fiery youth responded to this splendid assurance of their faith and the sense of his own power; but his face was grave and stern. Still silent, he permitted his house-carles to parade him around the vast building and lower him at length into the high seat.

Here, for all his stalwart frame lost in the huge throne, he leaned back against the cushions and gazed into the nearest of the four long fires which warmed the hall. The warriors, their gayety slipping from them as they perceived the solemnity of his mood, subsided into an uncomfortable silence, and furtively watched him.

He roused himself after a little, and fixed his eyes on the house-carles. High above him, the majestic head and shoulders of Odin, carved in the smoke-darkened oak of the chair-back, seemed to hover about him as if enfolding him in divine, protecting wisdom, and enhanced his own majesty with a godlike grandeur.

"You, Thorhall," the king began, "you, Halvard, captain of the archers, and all you who served my father faithfully! Halfdan has been foully slain, and is now with the gods. You know how I led my warriors to meet him in the Uplands; but you do not know that before I could set eyes on my father, he was murdered by Haki the Berserk at the instigation of Gandalf of Vingulmark. I shall avenge him."

The guardsmen broke into savage cries, curses, and fierce demands for vengeance; but Harald, raising his hand, compelled silence.

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"Partial vengeance I have taken already. I met Gandalf's son and his band of cutthroats in Hakdale, and fed their corpses to the wolves. Then, hearing that the Five Kings were plotting treason against me, I fell upon them at Ringsakir. Four of them I slew; Gandalf, and Haki his hired murderer, escaped me. Their turn will come."

Again the warriors interrupted him, this time with triumphant shouts; and again Harald checked them.

"All the long miles, all through the snow and the cold of the homeward journey, I have thought only of two things: how to effect my vengeance, and how to bring it about that such things as my father's murder shall not happen again. I have made my decision, and it will be hard for the man who tries to change it. Thorhall, send at once to all the fifteen chiefs who asknowledge my kingship in Westfold; bid them come to me as fast as feet will carry them! Let none dare disregard the summons; it is death to disobey!"

Thorhall touched his sword-hilt in token of submission, bowed, and left the hall.

"Clear the hall," Harald commanded; and the house-carles went out.

Long afterward, the king still sat motionless, staring into the glow of the dying fire.

NIGHT again; and the great hall was ablaze with the flare of the heaped fire-pits and innumerable torches ranged in iron brackets 'round the walls. In the restless play of the warm light, the features of the carven Odin glared red and malignant; beneath the portentous figure of the god, his own eyes scarcely less baneful, sat the young king, dominating the mail-clad men on the benches at his feet. Guthorm was there, and Thorhall, who commanded the home levies; Halvard, captain of the archers, and the fifteen chiefs of Westfold, each of whom held authority over a hundred families. Beside these, none was present; for no others had part in the council of state.

"Chiefs of the people," Harald addressed them, "I have summoned you hither that you may have part with me in the greatest deed that ever was done in Norway. You have heard what deeds have been done since Halfdan last summoned you together; and you expect me to require your help in avenging them. They shall be avenged; but not now. Greater things must come first. On the day of the Spring Sacrifice to Frey, I shall march North into the Uplands with every weaponed man in Westfold at my back.

"Not one will I leave behind; every man above the age of fifteen, able to bear arms, follows my banner. I shall go through the Dales to Gudbrandsdale, thence over the mountains of Dovrefjeld, and from Dovrefjeld even to Thrandheim Fjord. All who resist me I will crush. What goes on behind me does not matter, for Tunsberg will never be the seat of my royalty again. All Norway shall be my kingdom, and all its warriors shall be my subjects."

Old Guthorm gasped; the assembled chiefs stared at one another in stupefied amazement. Surely this boy was mad!

It was Guthorm who voiced the general surprise.

"Harald," he protested, "this is impossible! It is beyond the power of man! You propose to take a thousand men three hundred miles through hostile kingdoms, leaving not so much as a house-carle to defend your own land, and expect to live to reach Thrandheim Fjord! I tell you, you and every fool who follows you will be dead before you reach Gaulardale. I rejoiced when you swore to make all Norway yours; but this is no way to begin.

"You must expand your realm by degrees, overrunning first the lands nearest you on all sides, and spreading out from thence after you have made firm your rule in each new territory. I am an old soldier, and I entreat you, listen to my advice. At all hazards, do not go far from home. It is fatal to advance too far from your base."

"That was my father's way," Harald interrupted. "And how far did it take him? He died the master of a few paltry districts. What matters it how far I advance from my base if I care nothing what becomes of my base? See, Guthorm, we shall meet with no resistance till we reach Gudbrandsdale. Well, a thousand men can win Gudbransdale easily, especially now that Gudbrand himself is dead. I shall give the Dalesmen their choice of submitting and following my banner, or of dying.

"At least half of them will prefer a profitable raid on their neighbors to death; and I will swell my forces with them. From there, I will march on the mountains. The mountaineers will have the same choice, and with the same result. I count

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on gaining three hundred swordsmen from them.

"None will rise up behind me to attack the rear, for there will be none left alive who are not with me. The mountain-men will help me conquer the kings of Orkdale and Gaulardale; and these in turn will march with me against the Thrandheimers. That will be harder work, for Thrandheim is a warlike land, and its men are many. But it will end in the same way.

"Now consider the advantages of this plan; we shall cut Norway into two parts, lengthwise. All behind us will be ours: burned villages and grave-mounds will be the only memory of those who resist. All to the East will be easy picking; and as for the West, I can eat it, mouthful by mouthful, as I please. When Thrandheim is won, I shall have at least six thousand men from the conquered districts. I can take them down through the Western districts by land; or I can build a fleet, and harry the coasts from Thrandheim Fjord. There is no better harbor in Norway, and no more strategic point."

"But how will you hold the loyalty of those whom you conquer?" Guthorm objected.

"How did my father hold his vassal-kings?" Harald countered.

"By fear."

"Right. And every time he left Westfold to carry his arms into a fresh district, the kings furthest from his host revolted. No sooner did he march into the rebellious land than the others revolted; and so it went, year after year. The whole strength of the realm went into an endless suppression of petty revolts. Fear is a strong fetter, but advantage is a stronger. I propose to make it every man's advantage to keep faith with me.

"From the beginning, every king in Norway has amassed his treasure by plundering his neighbors; and with this treasure he has paid a small band of hired bullies to fight for him. Through fear of stronger kings, each one has maintained as large a force as he could pay; and each has always lived in fear that his treasure would give out and his men desert him.

"The great mass of the people have lived on as best they could, serving no man, fighting for no man, and always the prey of the little kings and their hired troops. I shall offer every king who submits to me the opportunity of living under my protection; if any other dares attack him, I will defend him and slay the attacker. In turn, he shall furnish me with a fixed number of warriors. These warriors are to be paid after a new fashion.

"Every king shall be master of the land in his realm; the peasants shall serve him, receive assurance of protection from him, and pay in return a head-tax: so much from each householder. All taxes, and all fines for breach of the law—for there shall be one law over all Norway—are to be mine; but I will allow to each king who serves me one-third of the taxes and the fine-money of his district. Out of this he will pay his warriors; and those warriors are to be subject to my call in time of war.

"The people will be glad to assent to this, for it will assure them of peace and protection from the neighboring kings; the kings will consent, for it assures them safety from their neighbors, since none will dare wage war without my permission; and their treasuries will always be full. There will not be a single man in all my realm, whatever his rank, who will not live longer and enjoy greater prosperity than his fathers dreamed of."

Guthorm pondered; and the others, waiting to take their cue from him, watched him in silent tension. At last he spoke:

"It is a good scheme," he assented slowly. "But it will demand strength and luck. I can see, my nephew, that you will have strength enough; for no man ever lived in this land before with the brain or the heart to think of such a thing; and we will trust to the gods for luck."

Harald turned to the chiefs.

"And you," he demanded, "will you dare what Guthorm dares? Will you follow me?"

They looked at each other; then, with one accord, they gazed at Guthorm. At last Bjarki of Ravenness rose to his feet, and a great light burned in his square features.

"I will follow you, Harald Halfdansson," he swore, "till the red spear rends my breast, and the Maids of Odin come for my soul!"

The others leaped to their feet, each eager to show his devotion before the rest.

"We will follow!" they cried, "We will follow! Victory to Harald!"

The king stood up, and gave his directions in quick, curt tones.

"Then say nothing of this night's talk till I bid you. Set your sword-smiths to work

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at once; fill your war-chests with arrows, sharpen your weapons, mend the rents in your mail-shirts. I shall need three hundred horses and five-score wagons; let each of you furnish his share. We need no provisions till we reach the head of Gudbrandsdale, for we can live off the country. In the Dales we can get what we need for the rest of the march."

He paused, and took from a wooden stand beside the throne an earthen bowl, and a long bundle wrapped in woolen cloth. The bowl he handed to Guthorm; with his knife he cut the cord around the cloth and unwrapped a sheaf of arrows. There were fifteen. Each arrow he dipped point-first in the bowl, then drew it out red and dripping with bull's blood. One by one, he passed these grim tokens out to the company, till each chief had his own.

"Send the war-arrow round the countryside at once!" he ordered. "Let each man pass the word to his neighbor that the gathering place is this hall, and the time, dawn on the day of Frey's Sacrifice. The man who fails shall die!"

Holding the war-arrows in their right hands, the chiefs swore obedience; and each in turn, bowing to the king, left the presence.

LATE on a raw February night, cold and weary, Thora stumbled over the threshold of Haki's refuge in Borghus. She was admitted by a yawning outlaw, who heaped fresh wood upon the low fire and brought her food and drink.

She had scarcely sat down when the door opened, and Haki came in from his sleeping-chamber.

"What news?" he asked eagerly.

Thora pointed to her plate, and went on with her meal. When she had finished, she went over to the fire and lay down by it, chafing her still cold hands. At last she said:

"Harald purposes to go North on the day of Frey's Feast. He will march through the Dales over the Dovrefjeld to Thrandheim itself, until he has either won all the land or fallen in the attempt."

Then, omitting nothing, she detailed to the impatient berserk Harald's entire plan, giving a full account of his forces, and describing the scene in the king's hall when Harald's chieftains received his commands for the expedition.

Haki's face grew bright with evil joy. When she had finished, he embraced her warmly, and asked—

"How in the name of Loki the Cunning did you learn all this, sweetheart?"

"Easily enough. No one in Westfold knows me. I passed myself off as a wealthy Swedish widow looking for an advantageous marriage. Naturally every one thought it quite proper that I should wish to know the family, possessions, and character of all the chief men in the land, since a helpless woman can not choose a husband without knowing something of him. In that way I learned that one of Harald's chiefs, Bodvarr of Borro, was an old carle with a taste for women and drink.

"I visited him, therefore, and let him understand that I would receive a proposal. A little ale, much flattery, and a few kisses did the rest; within two hours he had given me all the information I needed. I told him I would keep his offer of marriage in mind, and left the next day. Finally, lest my disappearance should rouse suspicion, I gave it out that my father was sick and had sent for me in haste."

Haki kissed her, then rose and walked up and down the room, rubbing his hairless chin and frowning. At last he spoke:

"Well, little bird, the gods have made Harald mad, and I foresee that he will not live much longer. If his little band gets safely through the lands of the fierce Dalesmen—which I doubt—the huge hosts of Thrandheim will eat it all up at one swallow. It is rather a pity, for he is a brave man. If he had my cunning, Norway would wake, some day, to find itself in the grip of a strong man."

"Norway will find itself in a strong man's grip if you act swiftly," Thora interrupted. "You must not lose a moment. Get your men together and start North tomorrow. The sooner we bring the news of Harald's invasion to my kinsmen in Thrandheim, the better prepared will they be to resist it. My brother will ask not other atonement at your hands than that you tell him of this, and marry me."

Haki shook his head.

"Not yet," he answered. "This news of yours gives matters a different turn. If I go to your brother Gipull now, and propose an alliance, he will ask, 'But what have you to offer? How many men can you put into the war against Harald? What good are you to us?' I have a better scheme.

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"You say Harald will leave Westfold unguarded. Well, instead of going to Thrandheim, I shall send messengers thither to warn all the North that Harald is coming against them. Then I shall visit Gandalf in Vingulmark. As soon as Harald marches away, Gandalf and I will fall on Westfold and make it our own. Your Thrandheim kinsmen will destroy Harald, and be very thankful to me for telling them to expect him.

"Gandalf will give me half the loot of Westfold, and, as soon as Harald is dead, will make me Earl of Agdir. Then I will say to your brother: 'Look, Gipull; I am a strong man now, a good ally and a dangerous enemy. I have designs against the whole South of Norway. If you will agree to support me in them, I will marry your sister, thereby wiping out the disgrace I brought on your house.' He will be glad to listen to me then."

Thora looked a little blank at this; but Haki, reading her mind, cast both arms about her.

"Never fear that I will break my word," he assured her. "I am bound to you by the strongest tie in the world—advantage. You and I need each other, sweetheart. If I cast you aside, your kinsmen would hunt me to my death; but if I make myself great through your help, and marry you, they will gladly assist me to gain the kingdom.

"For I tell you now, I shall be a king or a corpse before this business is over. And my best chance of winning the kingdom—and of making you queen, little bird—is to seize Westfold and gain such power and prestige as to make it worth your kinsmen's while to ally with me. As soon as Harald dies, I will make you my wife."

But other thoughts than these were in his heart.

"A king may have as many wives as he will," he reflected. "When I am Earl of Agdir, Eysteinn of Hordaland will be my near neighbor; and Gunnhild is lawful heir to the throne Eysteinn stole from her father Erik. Once I am married to her, I will have a claim to Hordaland. A few ounces of gold will bribe any of Eysteinn's housecarles to slip a dagger into him, and then the land is mine.

"My marriage to Thora will bind the Thrandheimers to me, and by their aid I will overthrow Gandalf and the other kings of the South. Then I shall have men enough to execute what Harald is about to try at his peril—the conquest of the North."

But of all this, the weary, trusting Thora suspected nothing.

THE days grew bright, the sun grew warm, and the earth once more assumed the green of Spring. From the courts of manors and farmhouses rose the clink of hammer on iron, the clash of mail, and the rasping grate of files. Wagons were standing in the yards, loaded with woolen blankets, bundles of arrows, spear-points, cases of bow-strings, spare horse-shoes, and all the impedimenta of an army.

Frey's Festival came with a rosy dawn; and before the palisaded garth of the royal hall stretched company on company of men, clad in coats of gleaming mail, polished steel caps, and woolen mantles. Every warrior was armed to the teeth, some with spears, some with bows and quivers; all with swords or axes. In front of the footmen, and on both sides of the palisade, squadrons of bearded horsemen waited the appearance of the king and his bodyguard.

At last came the bray of a brazen horn; and from the garth two horsemen rode, guarded before and about by even lines of house-carles. And if the hardy warriors without the gate were a goodly sight, these picked veterans, broad of shoulder, swelling of chest, with weapons and armor of the finest steel, were even goodlier, as they advanced slowly, steadily, with magnificent precision.

And now Harald rode out through the ranks to the very head of the host, turned, and surveyed his army. A tumultuous shout burst from a thousand lips; a thousand weapons flashed in the morning light, and a thousand hearts beat high with the joy of battle beneath the steel rings that confined them. Harald removed his helmet, and shook his shaggy hair of gold to the breeze.

"Forward, comrades!" he cried. "Forward to Thrandheim! Norway is ours!"

CHAPTER X

WAR IN THE DALES

A LITTLE more than twice the distance of an arrow-flight apart, two armies glared futilely at each other. To right and left of them towered the black masses of

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tortured, monstrous mountains, heaps of bare, bleak rock from their arid crowns almost to their rugged foundations. The valley between, flat and green as only a mountain meadow can be, save where the fire-blacked ruins of a farmhouse marked its center, was shaped like the head of a giant's war-ax. From its edges to the wind-level, thick rows and clumps of fir, birch, and mountain-ash tried valiantly to cloak the hideous nakedness of the crags.

Across the narrower end of the vale, the host of Harald lay behind two parallel lines of earthworks scarcely more than fifty feet apart; spearmen and axmen in the front line, their shields placed side by side on the edge of the rampart; the reserve lay behind. The two ranks were evenly divided, five hundred men to a line. Fifty feet more to the front, screened by the ax-thinned trees on either side, the king's archers awaited the enemy's attack.

At the broader end of the meadow, the men of Orkdale had thrown up an arrow-proof earthwork, lined, like those of the Westfolders, with their round war-shields. Close-packed, for they outnumbered Harald's force by half, and had no reserves, they had lain from dawn until late in the afternoon, sullenly refusing the aggressive, confident in their ability to hold the pass against the weaker Southern force. They had confidence, too, in their stout elm bows, and had built a breast-high rampart of earth and boulders for their archers just back of their main line.

Harald could feel the growing restlessness of his men. All the long way from Tunsberg, two hundred and fifty miles through endless forests, across swollen rivers and cold lakes, and for the last three days around, over, and through the winding, breathless ways of the Dovrefjeld's pitiless, demon-haunted crags, they had toiled and limped with dauntless courage and unfaltering patience.

Every night they had camped, for the king was not minded to use up the strength of his little band in forced marches; and ever they had expected to hear the hostile war-cries tear through the silent half-light of the Northern night. But the attack had never come; never an armed company had they seen until they entered the long wooded mountain fastness of Gudbrandsdale. Here they had felt sure of a hard fight; but the mountaineers had not once drawn weapon against them.

Thrice the wild clans had sent out their levies to challenge the invasion; thrice they had seen a shaggy, solitary figure signaling from some towering finger of rock to the sturdy Dalesmen invisible in the glens below; thrice the summons had been answered by the appearance of skin-clad clans. But every time the king's command to submit themselves and their lands to him had been obeyed without murmur or comment, and the wild men, eager for spoil and jealous of their neighbors, gladly enlisted under his banner and marched Northward with him, increasing his numbers by five hundred.

But the Orkdalers were of a different mettle. They had a king of their own; they had good farmhouses and large flocks of sheep to defend, and they had never owned the rule of any man not of their own blood. So soon as his scouts had descended into the dark entrance of the Ork Pass, Harald had learned, by the bitter instruction of a flight of arrows, that there were men who meant to defy him.

That was early on the previous evening. A brief, sharp struggle among the rocks, and the daring bowmen were put to flight. At once Harald sent his battle-hungry horsemen through the valley, to comb out the clumps of trees, examine every grove and stone wall within two hours' ride, and incidentally to burn every house, barn, and bothy in sight.

His infantry he had set to digging trenches, and to thinning the trees ahead of his line, where his archers were to stand and command the valley from both sides. By two hours after midnight, the cavalry having returned, the host was snug and safe in a well-fortified camp. They would be safe till morning; and with the dawn, they might advance.

But, brooded over by those towering mountain walls, the valley became, in the chill hours of early morning, so dark that the sentries could hardly see a bow-shot. The eery light of the open spaces was denied to this pocket in the robe of night; and when the gray of dawn filtered through the dark, Harald, awake and watching with the archers, saw the dull glint of the first light on the hostile spears, and made out the line of the Dalesmen's earthwork ahead.

They had crept as near, in the night, as had been safe; and with incredible silence, had

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dug trenches with their spears, rolled stones over the thick, muffling turf, and built a defense that barred him from further advance. He frowned, stroked his already thick gold beard, and sent for Guthorm.

The old man came to him, taking cover behind the fringe of trees. Not a word did Harald speak till he had come quite close; then, in a low voice, he asked—

"You saw to the posting of the horse as I bade you?"

"I did; and knowing how the wild men of Gudbrandsdale hate these Orkdalers, I took it upon myself to order them to support the horse. Five hundred they are; and the horsemen are something over twelve score. They are well hidden in the gulch you chose for them, a hundred ells behind the enemy's lines. The wood which conceals the entrance to their ambush forms a perfect screen."

"Well done," the king complimented him. "But I do not see why they failed to see, or hear, the Dalesmen approach, since no considerable force could enter the valley without passing close by the ambush."

"Never fear. Thorhall commands; and there is nothing that can slip by him. Nor is he such a fool as to risk sending a warning to you; for the messenger would have to work around the mountain to reach you, since it is clear he could not walk through the enemy, and the clank of his chain mail against the rocks as he stumbled in the dark would have betrayed your ambush. It was not your purpose, I think, to force a fight in the dark, in the enemy's country."

"You are right," Harald assented. "But I wish I had known how quietly the thieves could entrench. Thank Odin, I watched with the archers myself, and know they could not have crept closer to us through trees, or over the mountain. It will be a stand-up fight here in the valley, until we choose to spring our trap."

But the day had opened into full brightness; the rocks, as the sun mounted higher and higher, sent a purple vapor toward the dazzling blue sky above; and at noon, the radiant, golden light made the emerald of the grass—where it was not trampled down—glow with a rich, warm depth—and still there was no fight. Then the sun had moved away; the crags on either side cast their long shadows over the valley till they met; and still there was no fight.

Each side, sure of safety behind its earthen rampart and the sharp arrows of its archers, waited and waited, until impatience and rash courage should provoke the other to leave its barricade and risk a rush. Four hours after noon, and eager eyes still watched for the slightest movement across the hoof-and-flame-scarred green.

HARALD'S men were harder to hold than their foes, for the long march in constant expectation of fighting had whetted their impetuous valor until they strained to be off, like an arrow on the tensed string. But their king, no less eager than themselves, was prudent enough to hold them with all the strength of his inflexible will.

Once only had he made a mistake: when the strain had become almost intolerable, he had ordered a handful of men in the front line to make a feigned attack to draw the enemy from behind their works. But the fifty men he selected, carried away with their enthusiasm, disobeyed orders, and charged furiously on the unshaken line ahead till half of them were down with arrows through body or brain.

The rest turned, and made for the shelter of their own lines; and most of them got out of range and back to safety. But it had been made abundantly clear that aggressive tactics would not do.

Harald knew the Northern character well; and with cunning born of need, he passed a quiet order down the rank. Immediately after, the men in his front line began jeering at the enemy, with all the insulting obscenity and cutting insolence of half-civilized men-at-arms. Gibe after gibe they flung; and the Dalesmen paid them back in kind.

But at this kind of warfare the first blow is more than half the battle; and the Dalesmen, always one taunt behind, began to grow restive under the monstrous innuendoes of the Westfolders. Half-mad with rage at the broad imputations of cowardice, wanton shame, and vile ancestry heaped upon them, they chafed visibly, and swelled with helpless fury.

More than once individuals rose to their feet, and stepped over the parapet, but always a cool, commanding voice from the center called them back, and they resumed their places, cursing and shaking their weapons. After an hour of this, the

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invaders wearied, and the recrimination ceased.

Even Harald's grim patience was near to snapping. He gritted his teeth, choking down his rising anger as well as he could. A hand touched his shoulder, and he turned. Beside him stood Hornklofi the skald, clad in a mail-coat of double weave, with a great two-handled Irish sword clattering its five-foot length along his back.

"My king," he urged, in a voice that was almost a purr, "let me say a few Irish prayers to these ditch-huggers. I know a charm or two that would make a dead man rush to battle. Give me free play, and I will have them out of their hole in half an hour."

"The tongue of Loki the Bitter himself could not blister their hides," Harald replied. "Nevertheless, try your skill. If you succeed, I will give you a two-headed ax inlaid with gold."

Hornklofi stood up on the parapet, leaped down over the ditch below, and stood in full view of both armies. After the Dalesmen had had a long look at him, he put his right hand over his left shoulder, grasped his sword-hilt, and pulled the cumbrous blade out foot by foot. When it was clear of the scabbard, he threw off baldric, scabbard, and all, and strode almost to the middle of the field, where he stopped just out of range of the hostile arrows.

"Well have ye howled, oh wolves," he began, in a voice that rang clear and cold with scorn, "and if your teeth were as sharp as your tongues are long, ye would bite deep. But ye are well known as cowards that snarl at children and women, and slink away from the sight of men. It is your practise to creep in when your enemies sleep; but if the sleeper starts, ye flee. Therefore there is little hope of a battle with you.

"Your pleasure is not in war, but in gnawing the bones of those whom brave men have slain, plundering their corpses, and bloating your stomachs with dead flesh. There is not one of you who would not murder his brother, in the dark, for a silver penny. Yet it may be that there is among you some one who has come to visit you from another people, some one who was not born to your heritage of shame.

"If there be such a man, let him show himself, for since there is no chance that ye will furnish us with a struggle, I would fain have one bout before we put you to flight, and win one skin to nail on my door. If any wishes the honor of dying at my hand, let him come out like a man!"

It was too much. Disregarding the sharp order that was shouted after him, a gigantic shepherd of the hills sprang over the hostile earthwork, brandishing his broadsword, and literally foaming at the mouth with frenzy. Ragged locks of fiery hair and a matted, unkempt beard floated from under his helmet as he ran to meet his maddening adversary; and the white flecks spotted beard and chest. His flaming eyes and flushed cheeks expressed his rage as loudly as the incoherent rumbling of his bull-like voice.

Coolly, with a sardonic smile on his lips, Hornklofi walked to meet him, his two-handed sword slowly weaving to and fro before him. Both sides were hushed and still; not a man stirred, not an arrow flew, for it was against the Northman's code of honor to interfere with a duel.

So impetuous was the Dalesman's wrath that the two met not twenty feet from the invaders' lines. With a roaring oath, the red-beard flung himself upon Hornklofi, shouting as he struck—

"That for Hrolf of Orkdale, swine!"

The skald parried the stroke with his heavy blade, and the lighter sword of the other rebounded as from an anvil. Again Hrolf struck, and again, thrusting his body forward as close as possible to his foe. One after another, the first three blows fell harmlessly from the Irish sword; but the fourth was close, and Hornklofi leaped back just in time.

Requiring both hands to wield his weapon, he carried no shield, and had to parry with his blade. Hrolf forced the fighting desperately; but Hornklofi bounded back again, then to one side, and braced both feet, bending slightly at the knee, and swung his fearful weapon with all his strength. The Dalesman met it fairly with his shield; but the heavy edge sheared through the metal boss, through the wood, and severed the strap that bound it to the hairy arm behind. The useless shield fell to the ground; and Hrolf, beaten backward by the force of the blow, stumbled and almost fell.

He was up again like a wildcat, and flashed in once more. One of Hornklofi's long black locks fell to the ground, cut as

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with a razor. The Dalesman was in at last, behind the adversary's guard; and the long blade was too unwieldy to strike back. With the quickness of light, the skald reversed his weapon, and thrust the ponderous iron pommel full in Hrolf's teeth. Bloody and spitting, the giant recoiled, and involuntarily raised his left hand to his torn mouth.

So swiftly that he never saw the blow, Hornklofi slashed at his head; and the champion of the Dales fell headlong, his skull split to the jaw. The Westfold men raised a triumphant cheer; and Hornklofi stood wiping his smeared blade, the same cold smile on his lips.

WITH one wild yell of hate, the Orkdalers burst out of their earthworks, and mad with lust for revenge, poured down in disarray upon Harald's line. Their archers, carried off their feet with excitement, discharged one volley, which tore into the thick of their own men, then drew their swords and swarmed over the barricades.

The raging mass surged on like an angry billow, only to be met by a hail of barbed shafts from both sides of the valley, as the Westfold bowmen got the range. Well protected by the trees, they poured in clouds of arrows from between the sheltering trunks; yet, galled as they were, the Dalesmen swept forward, stumbling over bodies of their own dead, till they reached, and leaped down into, the ditch before the rampart.

Before them now stood seven feet of dirt, topped with a tight-locked shield wall. Holding their own shields over their heads, the Dalesmen thrust and scrambled upward as best they could, cursing the crumbling soil that gave neither hand nor foothold. Heavily fell the axes of Harald's house-carles, cleaving through shield and helmet; shrewdly the long spears were thrust down through throat or shoulder exposed by the heaving of the tangled mass below.

Soon the ditch was half-full of dead and dying Dalesmen, on whose bodies their fierce comrades mounted, till they were now nearly on a level with their foes. Now numbers began to tell. On either flank, the Dalesmen won their way across the rampart.

With a shouted command, Harald rallied the men of his first line, and brought his reserves leaping over the second earthwork to the open ground between. Up and down the line he went, Guthorm with him, marshaling the warriors in a new formation. Almost in a moment, the front line was formed into a convex wedge, with shields overlapping. Behind them, the second line formed a bar, closing the open end of the wedge, so that the whole array made a blunt triangle across the valley, with the obtuse angle facing the enemy.

Hardly were they in order when the storm burst upon them. But it burst only to recoil, as a wave breaks on a sea-cliff, for the well-trained house-carles stood firm before the desperate, ragged attack of their ill-disciplined foes. And now the archers of Westfold showed their mettle; for they turned, and rained in a terrible sleet of arrows on the dense-packed backs of the Dalesmen.

Torn by the cruel shafts from behind, beating helplessly upon that unbending shield wall in front, struck down by the swords and axes that lashed down upon their heads and gored their breasts, the Orkdalers fought with heroic courage. Great gaps were opened in their formless front, through which the living, striking wedge forced its slow, inexorable way forward, its flanks thrusting them back and to both sides. Pushed and trampled from behind, the earth rampart crumbled dustily into the already corpse-clogged ditch, back over which the fight now rolled with scarce a pause.

It was the fight of individuals against a disciplined army; and the trained machine rolled inevitably on, crushing and rending all in its path. For nearly an hour the savage fight endured without a break, till the Orkdalers had been thrust back to the middle of the field. Here, their numbers reduced by half, they strove to stem Harald's advance; but the ends of the wedge spread out, flanked them, and ground them to pieces. Flesh and blood could stand no more: they wavered, broke, and stampeded.

To destruction; for there, not twenty yards away and charging down on them like an avalanche, the cavalry of Harald barred their retreat. The Orkdalers had no time to think before the mounted men-at-arms were upon them, their long spears tearing through double-linked chain mail,

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their heavy swords crashing through the stoutest helmets. And between the horses dashed the savage, exultant men of Gudbrandsdale, cutting and stabbing like fiends.

In a panic of terror, the beaten Dalesmen threw down their weapons and cried for mercy. Only one among them held out, a heroic figure of a man, who, his back against one of the boulders that had formed their shelter earlier in the day, defended himself like Sigmund alone among his enemies.

At last, looking hurriedly about, he saw the slaughter of his folk; and throwing down his sword, he thrust aside a house-carle in the act of striking, and strode out to meet the apex of the Westfold wedge. Here Harald himself stood, his sword dripping.

Harald saw; and shouting to his men to cease the slaughter, he went to meet the beaten king. The captains of the host beat down the weapons of their blood-maddened men; and the battle was ended. Laying his hands in Harald's, the King of Orkdale acknowledged his defeat. And well he might, for of the fifteen hundred men who had rallied to his banner, not five hundred remained standing.

"What is your name and rank?" Harald questioned him.

"Gryting, King of the North Dales."

"Will you be my man, hold your lands under me, and follow me to battle?"

"I will, since I have no choice; and I could not follow a better man."

"Then we will rest in your land a week; and thereafter you and all of your fellows who can still bear arms shall follow me into Thrandheim. I am Harald Halfdansson, King of Westfold."

"I know that," Gryting answered. "We have had word of your advance ever since you left your own realm."

Harald flashed a sharp glance at him.

"Who sent you that word?" he asked.

"Haki, the berserk of Hadeland."

"It is but another spadeful of earth on his burial-mound. Has his story gone farther?"

"It has gone even to Thrandheim," Gryting assured him. "You will find sharp resistance there. But I think it will be vain resistance, for you fight as never man fought before."

"It will be vain," Harald assured him. "In a month's time I will crown myself king of all Norway in the hall of the kings of Thrandheim."

CHAPTER XI

DEATH IN THE HILLS

"WELL, the game is opened. Let us hope that we may live to make the last throw."

Thus Guthorm, rather grimly. The army, reinforced by three hundred of the Orkdalers, under command of Gryting himself, was busy breaking camp at the wide northern end of the Dale, where it had passed the pleasant Spring days of the last week recuperating from the recent struggle. So far, all had gone with unexpected smoothness.

A huge stretch of territory had been added to Harald's crown, at the cost of a single battle. The host, hardened to war and fatigue by the very conditions of Northern life, had undergone little real strain, in spite of the severe marches; for Harald had camped every night, and spared his men as much as possible. The fight with the Orkdalers had cost them little.

But things would go harder from now on. It was the king's plan to march direct into the heart of Thrandheim, the most warlike land in Norway. Eight kingdoms clustered about the shores of Thrandheim Fjord, an inland sea shaped like a long-tailed wolfhound with the head of a saber-horned mountain bull, and which wound for eighty miles of calm, land-locked water. The kings of these eight districts were allied by interest and intermarriage, and war with one of them would mean war with all. The Thrandheim folk were sturdy sailors and mountaineers, who would fight hard.

Not four miles to the northwest, the steel-gray waters of Thrandheim Fjord's western tip sparkled in the sun. To that tip Gryting's land extended; but its eastern boundary was marked by the hither side of a jumbled mass of mountains, which swarmed with the fierce highlanders of Gaulardale.

A shout suddenly burst from the lips of a bearded captain on outpost duty north of the camp, and he and his patrol sped toward the host on winged feet.

"Ships!" he cried. "Many ships! It is the men of Thrandheim!"

The host stood as if rooted, awaiting the word of command. Not for nothing had

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Guthorm trained his levies; and he and Harald had managed to thrust discipline down the throats of the Orkdalers, even in those short seven days. Harald shaded his eyes with his hand, and gazed out to the sun-bathed tip of the fjord.

"Twelve dragon-ships at least," he estimated, "but small, though heavy and well-made. I can not count the shields, for they run together in the light and distance, and their bosses flash so. There will not be above seven hundred men. Are you on bad terms with the Thrandheimers, Gryting?"

Gryting shook his head.

"Not until now," he answered. "Besides, as I told you, Haki warned them of your coming; and they would not dare attack in such small force. It may be an embassy to sue for peace."

Guthorm laughed in his throat.

"Not if I know the breed," he scoffed. "It will be some outlying princelet who prefers your cause to theirs, Harald. Nonetheless, we should do well to be on guard."

Harald blew a triple blast on his war-horn; and the host immediately formed in two close-packed ranks, the archers on the wings of the front rank testing their bow-strings and drawing arrows from their quivers.

At first, all they could see was the shape of the dragon-ships making for the land; then these blended in an indistinct mass, as they drew close to the shore and closer together. For an hour nothing more could be made out, for the sailors were disembarking and drawing the galleys up on the beach. After that, when the shipmen had lined up for the march inland, their ranks formed a black bar along the low white beach, and the light glittered on their spearpoints.

It was some time before the approaching force came up. They were a fine body of men, between six and seven hundred, and well armed. At the head of a small company of axmen in the fore-front, a tall old man advanced with the stride of youth; and by his side marched a burly warrior carrying a white banner, on which was blazoned the blue figure of a long-ship.

The old man, upright in spite of his many Winters, was of great size and mighty limb. His cheeks were smooth and healthy, and a snow-white beard fell to his waist. His helmet was of a fashion which had passed, heavy and conical, with two curling horns sweeping upward from it. A mantle of bright blue wool floated from his shoulders, half-hiding a coat of well-woven mail. When he came within hailing distance, he raised his weaponless hand in the peace-sign; and the simple gesture had in it something of inexpressible majesty.

Returning it, Harald advanced to meet him.

"Who are you?" the king inquired, "and what errand brings you here?"

"I AM Hakon Grjotgardsson," White-Beard answered, "Earl of Yrjar in Thrandheim; and you are Harald the King."

Harald shot a quick glance at him.

"How did you know that?" he asked sharply.

"I knew that Harald of Westfold had come to the North, intending to make himself master of all Norway; and since you are not Gryting, whom I know, you must be Harald. Moreover, there is in your face something of the look of your father, though you are more kingly than he. My purpose is to make peace with you, and to put my men and ships at your disposal. You will need them before you have finished with the Thrandheimers."

"And how comes it that you, a Thrandheimer yourself, should offer me your services against your own countrymen?"

Hakon's face flushed angrily.

"They are no countrymen of mine," he retorted. "I am earl in my own right, owing service to no man. Moreover, the Thrandheim Kings have tried for twenty years to take my heritage from me, and I do not thank them for it."

"You have defended yourself against eight kings for twice ten years?" Harald asked, his admiration showing in spite of himself.

"And could for as much longer, if Odin gives me life. Yrjar is a peninsula which closes the mouth of the fjord as a man might close a mead-horn with his hand. Its eastern end is narrow, and few men can easily defend it, wherefore the kings have been unable to take it. My ships are many and well-manned, and have often held the fjord's mouth against twice their number.

"They can hold it now for you, if you will accept my help. Say the word, and my twelve galleys in the harbor here will make for the fjord, and bid my fleet-captain cut off the escape of your enemies

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by sea, while you march over the mountains and invade their lands. You can pocket them neatly."

"But do you not know," Harald asked bluntly, "that it is my purpose to take away the free tenure of every king and earl in Norway, and to give them the choice of becoming my men or eating steel?"

"I know that," the old man answered, "and I ask nothing better than to be your man. The news I have had of you has shown me that he who is prudent will submit to you speedily, lest the gods call him to his fathers. I knew that if I did not come to you willingly, you would sooner or later come to me, and then I would have no choice. I prefer being trusted to being forced."

He could have made no stronger appeal. Harald, himself utterly frank, loved no quality better in another. His piercing blue eyes smiled delightedly, and he grasped Hakon's hand.

"I do trust you," he answered, "and I accept your offer. When I have won all Thrandheim, you shall be earl not only of Yrjar, but of Strind and Stjoradale as well. Are your men ready to march?"

"I must send my ships back to Yrjar, to order the fjord blockaded. The wind is favorable, and there will be no need of rowing; so ten men to a crew will be enough. The rest will march with you. But, by the ash of the gods! you have a great host, Harald! It is not often that house-carles march in as good order as yours, and your raw levies yonder stand in as true and straight a shield-line as most kings' body-guards."

"They are scarce sixteen hundred all told," Harald responded, "and that counts in Gryting's men, who never knew the worth of discipline till I taught it to them a week ago. They will not keep to their array in the heat of battle, but they are brave fighters. Your own fellows are every whit as good as mine, and will be of vast help to me."

"My lads ought to understand their trade," Hakon chuckled, "having been accustomed from boyhood to stand off many times their own weight. When you find yourself in the mountains yonder, with the rocks and javelins hurtling 'round your ears from a dozen cliffs and crags you can not reach, then you will learn how Yrjar men can fight! Your Westfolders are new to that game, and you will do well to let us lead the way."

"Gladly," answered Harald, "but I myself will march with you. I am curious to see this hill-fighting at close range."

"You will see it soon enough. We should be in the heart of Gaulardale by evening. Lucky you came just now, when Spring is melting into Summer, and the nights are bright. The hillmen will find it much harder to take cover without being seen than they would a month ago. But I think I know that tall fellow yonder; is it not Guthorm, your mother's brother?"

"It is Guthorm, and none other. But how did you make his acquaintance, for he has not been north of Hedemark, to my certain knowledge, since he was young?"

"I visited his father when he was a lad. He has changed little considering the years that have passed. We were hunting once, he and I, and he split the skull of a bear that had gathered me into its arms. Ho, Guthorm!"

Guthorm burst into a great shout and ran forward.

"Hakon Grjotgardsson, or I will eat my shield!" he cried; and flinging both arms about the old man's neck, he kissed him on the cheeks. "The gods are with you, Harald. I said we could trust to them for luck, and they have brought it to us. This old war-eagle can fight. You go with us, Hakon, do you not?"

"I go as far as you go, Guthorm, and maybe a bit farther. We shall see good sport where this nephew of yours leads us."

"Let us seek it at once, then!" Harald cried. "Fall in, all! Hakon, you take the van, and I will go with you. Here, boy, take my horse, and turn it loose."

The companies fell into their places: the Westfolders formed the main body of the host, with Hakon's men in the lead, and the Orkdalers bringing up the rear. Harald ran forward to take his place beside Hakon, and blew a shrill blast on his war-horn. Half-way down the line, some one struck up an old war-song, made in the dim days when history and legend were as one:

The day has come up with din of cock's feathers:
'Tis time for the weary to seek the toil-winning.
Wake ye, oh wake ye, heads of my war-mates,
All ye that are swiftest, spear-friends of Adils!

Harr the hard-gripper, Hrolf the spear-thrower,
Men of good kin, that never kenned fleeing!
To wine or to women's song wake I ye never—
I wake ye to death and the dark game of battle!

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All along the line the song passed, one full-throated voice after another taking it up; and up the line, the leather-lunged Yrjar-men bellowing it out lustily. And to the lay of a bard long dead and gone, Harald and his eager warriors marched into the towering hills that guarded the dark and bloody land of Thrandheim.

THE army halted between the thick columns of two mighty cliffs. Before them stretched a deep, precipitous ravine, rent in what was once a single mountain by some tremendous natural cataclysm. Bare and rock-strewn, this was the gateway to the stony kingdom of Gaulardale, the far-flung outpost of the eight Thrandheim realms.

"By this road, it is a rough ten miles to Gaulardale," Hakon said, pointing through the pass. "This is the way the enemy expect you to come, and they have doubtless prepared a welcome for you. There is a wide ledge about four miles further on, situated a hundred feet above the bottom of the pass.

"An army can camp on that ledge, and be safe from attack from below; for there are many boulders to cast down on any who come this way, and the slope is too steep to climb. Besides, they have probably closed the pass beyond by felling trees and dropping them down across the road. You will be caught as in a deadfall. Do you care to go on?"

"It is not to my liking," Harald frowned. "Is there no other way?"

"There is, but it will take five hours. You must leave the road here, strike 'round the northern side of the mountain, through forests and over the steepest side, cumbered with rocks and crisscrossed with deep faults. After making a circuit of eight miles, you must climb straight up the mountain, to the very crest. Having topped the ridge, you will be just above the ledge, where the Gaular folk are doubtless waiting. They will expect you to come by the pass, knowing that you are not familiar with the country.

"Once over the ridge, you will be in a position to drop down on them and catch them in their own trap. There will be no escape for them, any more than there would be for you if you took the pass; for the ledge ends, on this side, in a blank wall. Of course, I may be wrong, but I think not; for the ledge offers them their best chance. They cut the host of Olvir of Mora to pieces in that very spot two Summers ago, and will hope to play the same trick on you."

"Then we will go 'round," Harald answered. "But what is to prevent them from going back the way they came, by the eastern end of the ledge, when they see themselves outmaneuvered? I think, Hakon, I will send you and your men around the far end of the mountain, to cut off their retreat."

Hakon laughed.

"Give a good dog the scent," he observed, "and you will not have to lead him."

Like a monstrous snake, the army swung its head back and around the northern cliff, and wound about the shaggy flank of Troll's-Howe, the mountain-bastion of Thrandheim. On they pressed, grim with the thought of the fighting ahead, and silent under the influence of the majestic forest with which the slopes were clothed. Nor did a man so much as speak when the spaces grew lighter, and they came out into a clearing at the foot of a steep slope; for they were in hostile country, and none knew when they might come upon the armed forces of the enemy.

Half-way across the glade, Hakon pointed to a path that crossed the mountainside above them diagonally.

"That is your way," he directed. "I go on, and it will be two hours yet before I reach my station. When I am there, or if I am seen by the enemy, I will attack at once. As soon as you hear the noise of battle, strike!"

"I will," Harald grimly replied. "You will have no cause to reproach me."

Swiftly and silently, the Yrjar men crossed the glade and disappeared among the trees on the other side.

It was nearly all of the appointed two hours before the king saw the last of his own force up the mountain. At his direction, they spread out along the bare rocky ridge, but did not show themselves against the skyline. Taking off his helmet, Harald bade Guthorm and Gryting do likewise, lest the glint of the light on steel betray them.

He then crawled the few remaining yards to the top, the two chiefs after him; and all three took cover behind the sparse

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growths of juniper, and peered down the other side. Well for them that there was cover to take, or the sun at their backs would have shown them up pitilessly.

Below them, as on the farther side which they had just climbed, stretched the almost bare, bleak rock for nearly a hundred yards. The peak sloped at an angle of forty-five degrees. Then came a thin line of mountain birch, through which they could see a wide, outthrust table-land dotted with mail-clad men. Some were resting on their arms, others were gathering rocks, or rolling boulders to the edge, which seemed to break off suddenly.

The watchers could not see the pass but they knew that these preparations were intended for them, and were glad that they had had Hakon to counsel them. It was well, too, that the Gaularmen were so sure of success, so reliant on their foe's ignorance of the country, that they had neglected to post sentries on the crest.

As they watched, a man detached himself from a group of spearmen, and came straight through the birches and up the rise toward them. Harald whispered a short warning to the others, and slipped down behind the ridge, Guthorm and Gryting after him. Gliding snakewise down the rock, Guthorm signaled to an archer, who crept toward him, and at a word, fitted an arrow to his bow-string.

"In the throat," whispered Guthorm, "or he will cry out."

The archer nodded. A minute passed, and another. At last a helmeted head appeared, clear and sharp against the sun. In the same instant, the Gaular-man saw the host lying in wait before him, and an almost comic expression of surprise and fear came over his face. It was frozen there forever, for before he could move or cry, the barbed arrow stood fixed in his throat, its feathered tail quivering.

The archer threw himself forward without rising, seized the dead man by the shoulders, and dragged him behind the concealment of the roof-like ridge. Without a word, the king drew a ring from his finger and pressed it into the archer's hand.

Once more Harald took up his watch. After a moment he beckoned to Gryting, who flattened himself behind a bush. The king pointed down to the west.

"There," he said, "lies the entrance to the pass, where we would have entered the trap but for Hakon. I can not see the angle of the slope from here, and mayhap it is too sharp to descend. But when we hear the noise of Hakon's lads at the eastern end of the ledge, you take your men straight down, after me, and then turn sharp to the west, till you come to the rock wall which closes the ledge.

"Pay no heed to the battle, but find a way down to the pass, and guard its western end. Hakon will hold them at the other end; I will plunge down on their rear. They are scarce a thousand men in all: Hakon could eat them up without help, if his men are as good as he says. But if there is any way down to the pass, as I am sure there must be, they will try to escape through it.

"Their own barrier of trees, which you can see them finishing now—" and as he spoke, a dozen Dalesmen pushed a fresh-cut birch down over the eastern lip of the ledge—"will cut them off from the homeward road. They will make for the western end, and the road to Orkdale. You will be waiting for them. Is it plain?"

Gryting nodded; but before he could speak, suddenly a startled cry rang out; and then babel broke loose below. The Gaular folk burst into feverish activity, running hither and thither, seizing their weapons, shouting confused orders, and crying out in excitement and alarm. But in a moment they had recovered their wits, and swiftly arrayed themselves into a solid wall at the eastern end of the table-land. The next instant the slight rise beyond them glittered with the mail of a phalanx of spearmen, advancing almost at the double, yet in a solid, unbroken line.

Harald sprang to his feet.

"Now then, Gryting! On them, men! It is Hakon! Will you keep him waiting?"

EVERY warrior leaped from ambush, and waving their swords and axes, the fierce companies of Westfold poured down the mountainside. As they ran, they could see the lift and flash of weapons, could hear the sharp cries of the Gaular men, the clash of steel on steel, and the crunch of shattered flesh and bone. Not a word did the grim Yrjar men utter; schooled by years of bitter fighting, they hewed and stabbed in a fearful silence.

Before their unaided assault the mountaineers flinched and wavered; and when the wild wave of Harald's warriors surged

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upon their backs, their ranks caved in like the sides of a ship caught between the breakers and a jagged sea-cliff. For a little while they stood, striving to face both foes at once, and striking blindly, not knowing whether the blood upon their weapons came from friend or foe. But they were outnumbered, and hopelessly trapped.

The attackers strove to turn their right flank, and crowd them to the wall of the slope; but they saw the danger, and retreated, step by step, to their right, allowing Hakon to turn them on the left. Harald, who might have prevented this, let them reach the lap of the ledge, and then fell upon them with redoubled fury. Five minutes afterward, the formation of the Gaular men was dissolved into confusion, a full half of them had been thrust or had jumped to the steep slope below, and the rest fought bravely to cover the retreat of their comrades. At length the double assault surged over them, and such as survived the stroke of spear and sword leaped after their companions.

Hakon rested on his sword, smiling ruefully.

"You are a good enough swordsman," he shouted to Harald, whose blade was hacked and bloody, "but you are not yet a soldier. You have let them get away."

Harald pointed to the eastern end of the pass. The old earl looked and saw a disordered mob of fugitives making for home. As he looked, the foremost of the fleers gave a yell of fright, and brought up, in full career, against the barrier of trees. For hours the Gaular men had worked to make this barrier to trap their enemies, and now they were caught themselves.

Jammed tight with the momentum of their descent from the ledge, a dense mass of trunks and branches closed the pass from wall to wall, twenty feet high, and so thick that a fox could hardly have thrust his nose between. The Gaular men saw their plight, and broke into shrieks of terror.

"Gryting awaits them at the other end," Harald called; and old Hakon's face took on a glow of unholy delight.

"The rocks!" he shouted, and seizing a stone the width of a shield, he cast it down upon the wretched men below.

Yrjar men and Westfolders rushed to the piles of stones and boulders so carefully collected by their foes and hurled them down the steep mountainside. They fell crashing among the stricken Gaular men, crushed man after man into a mass of writhing limbs, or thundered like an avalanche upon six and seven at a time. A frightened knot of swordsmen, gazing helplessly up at the doom that fell inexorably from the heights, was blotted into eternity by one round lump of granite.

From one end of the ledge to the other, the hurling death descended. With frightened howls, the Gaular men fled for the western end, hoping to escape into Orkdale.

"We shall hear music soon," Hakon commented; and immediately after, the battle-cry of Gryting's men tore through the cries of the fugitives. Then came a sound like the slaughtering of many cattle; and in a little while, pursuers and pursued streamed back through the pass, from one shambles into another. Again the rocks crashed down upon them, and the pass ran red.

Harald felt suddenly sick.

"Enough!" he cried. "This is not war but murder."

He raised his war-horn to his lips, and blew three long blasts. Slowly, the tumult died down, for the Orkdalers were reluctant to leave their quarry; but at last the fighting stopped. Harald could not look down, but Hakon watched the pass with eager eyes.

"See there!" he cried, and grasped the king's arm.

Harald forced himself to peer over the edge.

"By Odin!" he exclaimed. "Those men deserve to escape! They are climbing up the cliff side, rather than surrender!"

It was true. The liberty-loving Gaular men, such as were left, were painfully clambering the precipitous slopes across the pass. Ever and again one, worse wounded than the rest, fell tumbling down to death; but the others climbed on, foot by foot, while Gryting and his men stood by, raging at the king's mercy.

"Where will they go?" Harald asked of Hakon.

"South into the Uplands, and so around the mountains into Strind, to seek safety with the eight Thrandheim Kings. These hillmen never know when they have a bellyful: you will find the ones that get away waiting in Strind to fight you again."

TO BE CONTINUED

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Shorty's Letter from Home

BY Sidney Rittenberg

POOR ol' "Shorty" Clark! It's easy to say 'twas his own fault, but I guess the same could 'a' happened to me or anybody. Mind-readin' is only mind-readin' most places, an' you laugh an' forget it. But them Hindus make an art of it. Is there anything in 'em? That's wot I asks myself. I've seen this an' I've 'eard that, an' I've been to Calcutta more times than I can count on my 'ands. An' I just don't know, that's all.

The old *Saybrook* was at her dock in Calcutta for a three weeks' discharge. Third day in port I an' Shorty Clark got shore leave, though the Ol' Man was mighty skittish about it. Rumors 'ad come in of plague in the south end o' town, an' 'e warned us to be all-fired careful; which we wasn't.

There's only one Calcutta in the world. I've been in many 'arbors an' streams, but never get into the Hugli River without thinkin' it's the thickest mess o' shippin' I've ever seen. The town's full o' sights—post-orfice, museum, an' a prummynade they call the Maidan. But the most noticeable thing about it's the reek. There ain't another place in the world that hits the nose like Calcutta on a hot day.

The day was a narsty one, an' Shorty an' myself wasn't any too spry when we got ashore. We'd seen all the main sights before, so we struck for the native quarters an' drifted 'round sort o' aimless-like, takin' in refreshment an' such, for a few hours. Then the weather got worse, an' we stopped in at a little shop to get out o' the water.

The place belonged to a old chap named Jori Chunder, a rope-maker, who picked up somethin' on the side providin' entertainment to British sailormen. Shorty 'ad been there before an' he recommended it.

This Jori had a daughter, a girl about seventeen, one o' them young Indian widders, 'avin' married young an' lost her man soon after. Well, sir, she 'ad the most peculiar pair o' eyes I ever 'ave seen in a body's 'ead, man or woman. Jori, he claimed she 'ad a power o' mind-readin', or some such, which she'd show us for an anna or two.

It looked like the usual to me, an' I didn't 'ave any faith in that sort o' craft. I laughed an' told the old fellow not to trouble. But Shorty wouldn't have it that way. Said 'e'd 'eard no end o' things about the girl. So I gave in an' went into the back o' the place with the two of 'em.

She set 'im in a chair an' took a seat before him, payin' no attention whatever to me. She didn't start off with any foolishness like workin' her 'ands up an' down 'is head, as I'd seen some o' the Hindus do. Nothin' but sit an' stare, sit an' stare, not blinkin' a lash, nor so much as drawin' in a breath. She didn't need to do anything. Shorty was fallin' under her spell good an' 'ard—forcin' 'imself into it, you might say.

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They sat that way so long that, what with standin' up an' feelin' altogether foolish, I was just on the point o' lettin' out a laugh, when she opened up. She spoke fair English for a native—picked up, prob'bly, for just that business. An' she played 'er part well, voice an' eyes an' all of it.

First she calls 'im Clark Sahib, which wasn't so surprisin', seein' as Shorty 'ad been there before. Shorty keeps lookin' at 'er, ready to drink in every word an' believe it. 'E was that kind, was Shorty.

Next thing I knew I heard the girl tellin' Shorty about how 'e was thinkin' of 'is folks in South 'Artlepool, which was where 'e lived, all right, an' tellin' 'im she could see his wife an' three children, an' she hit the mark that time, too. Finally, after a long pause, she says:

"Oh, but I see gloom an' deep sorrow. Some one you love, Sahib. One you love dearly. Deep trouble—it is the red fever. Gloom—perhaps death. Oh, the two little ones."

An' with them comfortin' words, she stopped off on a sudden an' begun to choke an' shake like a leaf. Shorty shook, too. Jori Chunder ran to the girl with a cup o' some green stuff an' after she drunk it, she was all right again in a jiffy.

Jori asked me if I wanted to 'ave my mind read, but Shorty seemed so 'ard hit that I told 'im I guessed not, an' took Shorty out o' the shop.

"Wot's the matter o' you, matey?" I asks him when we'd got on the street again. "You don't take no stock in that sort o' thing, do you?"

Shorty didn't answer me.

"Why," I says, "I might 'a' been scared if she 'adn't thrown one o' them fantastic exhaustin' spasms at the finish like most o' these 'Indu mind-readers. I knew she was just another humbug, then. Come, cheer up, man."

For answer Shorty 'ands me a letter he'd had from home that day. I read it. It was a lot o' town talk, an' at the end it said the missus was ailin' an' one o' the young uns was down with the measles. That, thinks I, is the trouble.

An' there was Shorty, poor fellow, still tremblin' an' shakin'. I did the best I knew to cheer 'im up, but 'e would only take out the letter an' look at it again. It was no use, an' we headed back for the ship.

Talk about an idee gettin' under a man's skin! I never see a human bein' took like Shorty Clark was. The rest o' the time we were in Calcutta 'e had little to say, goin' ashore only once, an' then for a little shoppin'. There was one time when I thought 'e had it in 'is head to cut loose an' get back home as fast as he could, but he wasn't worried bad enough for that—not then.

ONCE out to sea it was worse, an' growin' on him every day. There's ten hundred different things happen aboard ship a man can figure to be one kind o' luck or another, accordin' to his frame o' mind. I don't talk big about it, neither. I've been hit that way myself. But I do say as how Shorty Clark was worse off than any I ever saw. Superstition? You couldn't call it that. It got to be too reg'lar with him. There wasn't the slightest little howdy-do out o' the ordinary that didn't mean something to Shorty on that run from Calcutta to Port Said. An', o' course, nine out o' ten meant bad luck.

'E slackened up on 'is vittles, and what with that an' lyin' awake nights an' worryin', 'e got to lookin' like a ghost in no time. 'E'd get about his work like a man walkin' in 'is sleep, till the first orf'cer had to 'ave him up to the Ol' Man about it. I managed to get in a private word with the skipper an' he gave Shorty a lot o' plain talkin' an' advice, tryin' to quiet his nerves. But no, sir. It couldn't be done. The words o' that little Hindu she-witch was eatin' his heart an' 'e couldn't 've grieved any 'arder if 'e'd already heard o' the death of his whole family.

Time after time I tried to talk him out of it. But it was too hard a job for me.

"It's good o' you, Bill," 'e'd say to me, "but just let me be. I'm resignin' myself."

"Aw, Shorty," I'd answer. "You talk like a scared female. There ain't nothin' to resign yourself to," I says.

Then 'e'd look at me hard a minute and shake 'is head an' say:

"It's no use, matey. I see it in dreams. I'm goin' to hear when we get to Port Said. You wait an' see."

I couldn't get any more satisfaction than that. Others tried to argue with him—the whole ship knew the story by that time. But they were no better than me.

We got into Port Said at last an' nobody

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thought o' anything but Shorty's trouble. As soon as the mail got down to the ship, nearly the whole crew got around to see if there was anything for Shorty. Even the orf'cers were on hand, it was such a queer case.

There was a letter for Shorty, all right—one letter from South 'Artlepool, 'is home. 'E looked dazed as he held out his hand an' took it, an' he walked away, puttin' the letter in his pocket. Some o' the men looked right disappointed, but they soon got to readin' their own mail an' forgot for a while about Shorty.

But I hadn't any letters an' I followed the poor fellow for'rd.

Shorty sat down on a chest an' I stood by him. I don't know why, unless I thought it 'd be good for him to have some one near 'im when he got the news. Maybe, too, I was more curious than the rest, havin' been with him when it all started.

He raised his 'ead an' looked at me.

"Well?" I says to him.

He didn't answer, except to take out the letter an' groan.

"Buck up, ol' man," I says, as cheerfully as I can. "It won't do no good to hold out on yourself like that. Read it an' find out the worst."

"I carn't," he moans, then hands me the letter. "Open it for me."

I opened it an' handed it back to him. For a long time 'e held it there in 'is hand, lookin' down at it, his face full o' misery. I couldn't stand it.

"Go on, Shorty," I says. "Be a man an' read it."

He heaved a big sigh an' set to, readin' word by word. I watched 'im, but his face didn't show a thing but the same dumb misery. After a second or so, 'e dropped the letter an' buried his head in 'is 'ands. I picked it up an' patted 'im on the shoulder, tellin' 'im to go on with it an' get it over.

Then he braced up as well as 'e could, heaved another sigh, an' started again. I was gettin' tired by then an' I turned my back an' walked away a few steps. But I heard a noise behind me an' turned. There was Shorty sittin' up straighter an' lookin' at the letter as if to bore it with 'is eyes.

"So," I thinks, "he's seen it. 'Ere it comes." An' I braced myself for the shock.

Shorty sat an' stared at the paper till I thought 'e'd never finish. Then 'e jumps up, gives one big yell an' grabs me 'round the neck.

"Hey! Wot's the matter with you?" I yells.

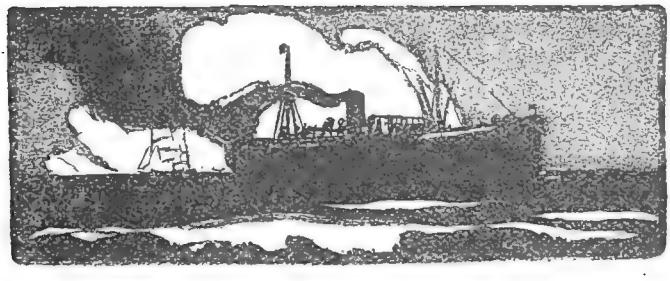
'E keeps on a-huggin' away at me an' makin' strange noises halfway betwixt a sob an' a shout. An' me all the time tryin' to get loose an' find out what it's about. I got him off an' he stood there grinnin' at me till I got good an' mad.

"Wot's eatin' you, you fool?" I shouts, tryin' to get some sense back in 'is head. I really thought for a minute he'd gone crazy with the shock. But he hadn't.

Throwin' the letter in my face, 'e lets out another whoop an' yells at me:

"It's twins! Glory to God, it's twins!"

An' then he breaks out cryin' like a girl that's in love for the first time.



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McLEAN MENDS HIS MEDICINE

By Hugh Pendexter

Author of "The Ambush in the Pipe," "The One Alone Called Kiwasa," etc.

BROKEN LANCE and his Ogallala Sioux, severely whipped by cavalry fled to the Big Horn Range. Throughout the Spring and Summer of 1850 the red tide had surged along the Great Salt Lake Trail and now was at its ebb with the troopers rounding up the stragglers. This retiring movement of the Indians gave McLean his chance. For twelve months he had sought it and had quit the employment of the American Fur Company to be ready for the opportunity. Behind the screen of dashing cavalry he had followed the Sioux to the foot of Cloud Peak, mighty sentinel of the Big Horns, without his presence being suspected by either soldier or warrior.

The fact he was in the heart of hostile country worried him none. Isolation in Indian country always had for its complement the danger of surprise attacks; and McLean philosophically accepted the red men as he did the various other hazards of his lonely occupation. But had it been otherwise there was no risk he would not take in order to meet Broken Lance. Ever since receiving an important bit of information from a Crow Government scout he had sought to find the chief.

McLean looked much older than his thirty-odd years warranted. Innumerable fine wrinkles in his forehead suggested a withered apple. Twelve months back his brow had been smooth; ill-luck and much brooding had engraved their story; and he was superstitious enough to believe that only a private meeting with the Ogallala chief could terminate the evil spell.

A year before, while camping with a small band of troopers on the Sweetwater he and his soldier hosts had been jumped at night by an overwhelming force of hostiles and shot to pieces before they could quit their blankets. He was the only survivor, and ever since the massacre his medicine had been weak. The darkness had prevented the Indians from determining which red hand had accounted for a victim; and, as the red man's philosophy does not permit of controversy in the distribution of loot, the raiders rested content with slaying anonymously, and had departed without pillaging the camp. And yet they carried away with them something McLean was determined to have back, or its equivalent, if it took a lifetime.

His camp was hidden in a little ravine; a careful scout of the surrounding country had located the Indians beyond a rugged ridge, far enough removed to permit of a pipe, although cooking was tabooed except at night. The influence made upon him by long experience with the red men was indexed when he came to measure out his tobacco. Although constrained to be economical of the precious weed he spared a pinch for the earth, a pinch for the sky, and puffed the first of the blue smoke to the four points of the compass to propitiate the wind-gods.

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Extended familiarity with the Indian trend of thought had caused him to adopt many of their habits and some of their beliefs. While his white man's mind might make light of the aborigine's mythological concepts, yet, he reasoned, it could do no harm and might be safer if he observed some of their formalities. The deepest dent the red influence had left on his comprehension was his firm belief in good and bad luck.

He did not believe with them that their medicine-men could turn themselves into wolves, and being limited in his reading he could not know that up to the seventeenth century in France it was a crime for a person to be a werewolf. But surely thirteen is an unlucky number, and crickets bring good luck, while it is a waste of time for a medicine-man to attempt new medicine immediately after stepping over a warrior's gun.

McLean sometimes expressed it—

"It's a cussed queer game, an' there's lots to it."

So because of this mélange of belief and half-belief he never smoked without first offering his tobacco to the earth and sky and four winds.

Having limited himself to one pipe he smoked it slowly. The deepening shadows furnished a screen for the pictures his mind was ever sketching. Subject and composition were ever the same: a snug camp on the Sweetwater, his arrival and welcome by the cavalrymen, the scoffing at his hint of danger; then darkness streaked with flashes of fire, fiendish yells and the crashing shock of unconsciousness.

Putting up his pipe he drew from his hunting-shirt a bit of skin and smoothing it out on his knee proceeded to study it as a seer might gaze at a crystal. It had been found clutched in his hand when he was picked up for dead along with the slain soldiers and furnished the first clue to the identity of the raiders. It was skunk-skin, such as Sioux war-chiefs often wore attached to the heels of their moccasins to signify that they never retreated, the skunk being famed for its independent manner of traveling.

Beginning with this knowledge McLean commenced a process of elimination and ceaselessly interviewed Government scouts and friendly Indians. He narrowed his quest rapidly up to a certain point and was then brought to a standstill till he happened to encounter the Crow scout. The scout proved to be his most definite source of information. Broken Lance could, if he would, said the Crow, name those who were in the Sweetwater war-party. ThereuponMcLean set out to obtain from Broken Lance a census of the raiders. Once he secured this list he believed he could find some one brave whom he could compel to tell who had lost the skin symbol from his heel.

The great obstacle to his interviewing Broken Lance was the continued hostility of the Ogallala. Could he go to the chief during a truce, when the Indians were simulating a desire for peace while they repaired their losses and procured fresh arms and ammunition, he was confident he might learn the truth. The second best opportunity for an interview was afforded now that the Ogallala had fled to the Big Horns. His quest, however, depended entirely upon his catching Broken Lance apart from his warriors.

Prolonged absences from white men had given the trapper the trick of talking his thoughts aloud. Sometimes an impudent squirrel was his audience, again it might be his patient pack-animal. But now, with the piece of skin in his hand, he addressed the inner man, that insistent ego which was ever commanding him to strengthen his weak medicine and remove the bane which was souring his life. As this mental attitude flogged him on to action McLean, with simple directness, defined it by saying—

"No good luck can come to me till I even this thing up."

Speaking in a low monotone as though reciting a well-conned lesson he began:

"Ye see it's sure to be known through th' whole Sioux nation about th' injun losin' this scrap o' skin from his moccasin. It's th' little things like that what are played up in all their Winter counts (system of chronology). Reckon if I could git a look at their counts this next Winter I'd find last year marked by some mention o' th' lost skunk hide. But I may be wiped out afore Winter if my bad luck keeps up. An' if I ain't they'll prob'ly keep on th' war-path so I won't have no chance to git nigh 'em. If they lay low, Broken Lance won't go off alone anywhere. An' there ye be.'"

Then as if his invisible self were rebuking him for balking at any obstacle he defended;

"I tell ye it ain't so easy as it looks. What good would it do f'r me to meet Broken Lance in a fight? I've been sweatin' blood

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ever since th' Crow talked f'r fear he'd be wiped out afore I could have a powwow with him. I've got to git him where I can make him have a peace talk, or hold him up by his lonesome an' screw th' truth out of him. They ain't ready f'r any peace yet. My only chance is to find th' chief afore his band gits rested up an' ready to start raisin' hell ag'in. Of course I could try to make sure by goin' arter th' whole outfit."

This last resort, even though it succeeded, would not be satisfactory, however. Even should he kill off every brave of the raiding party it would ease his mind none unless he knew when he got the right one. But once that definite knowledge was his and he could accompany the mortal blow with, "That's f'r th' Sweetwater 'fair," he was positive his medicine would grow strong and that the malignant hag riding his soul would be cast off.

The sun dropped below the ragged horizon with a farewell fling of glory at the summit overhead, and the ravine began filling with shadows. McLean rose and looked to his rifle and knife, and muttered:

"It's this a-way. They've been licked good an' proper. While restin' up in this neighborhood they'll sure try to find out what's wrong with their war-medicine. Each one will steal off alone to square hisself with his personal god, scared like sin less some one else finds out from what partic'lar god he's askin' help. But it's Broken Lance, their leader, who's in f'r the longest set-to. Th' whole nation will be blamin' him f'r this last lickin'. His men will expect him to come back from th' mountain with some Simon pure medicine. I'll jest trail him till I catch him alone. Then mebbe he'll talk." And he patted his rifle grimly.

EVERY North American Indian tribe has its own protecting god. Every clan within a tribe is similarly under beneficent guardianship. And again, every individual warrior has his personal tutelary. As these personal gods vary in power it is of the most vital importance to the individual that the identity of his god be kept a secret. For should it be learned by another warrior, actuated by enmity and possessing a superior deity, he might destroy, or win over the lesser tutelary from his allegiance. This would spell ruin for the defenseless brave.

McLean was well versed in these beliefs and subscribed to them in a degree. He was firmly convinced that his own ill-luck, dating from the massacre, was the result of weak medicine. His own spiritual ally —*oyaron*, the Iroquois called it—had been completely routed. But streaking his superstition was the white man's confidence in race superiority—a quaint combination of theism and egoism.

Inasmuch as each Indian's life was under the protection of some spirit the Indian must always have about him some material object which was a symbol of his personal tutelary; and such a symbol—be it arrow, knife, a dried plant, or what-not, is the warrior's most sacred possession. It was always at hand, carefully wrapped in skins. Feasts must be made in the god's honor to keep it in good-humor and renew its strength. For these personal gods were childishly jealous at times and would allow their wards to ride to a fall unless catered to becomingly.

McLean's hope of discovering Broken Lance alone hinged on this understanding of the Indian mind. There was no question as to the chief's withdrawing to some secluded spot to invoke and placate his guardian spirit. The trapper's purpose from the start had been to overtake the hostiles in time to trail their leader to the secret place of making new medicine.

Pursuing this plan he quit the ravine and crossed the high ridge and camped on its southern flank, where he had a wide view of the surrounding country. A thousand feet down the slope were the Indians. Descending till he could obtain a close view of the teepees he counted some sixty warriors. These seemed to be idling away the time as though waiting for something. Throughout the day McLean kept watch and slept that night on a bed of moss. The early sun was chasing the mists from the camp when he awoke.

There was much activity in the camp. A drum, improvised from a kettle half full of water and tightly covered with buffalo skin, was giving out a hard, thudding note, and, with the chanting voices, advertised a ceremonial dance. The vapors cleared from the teepees and McLean tingled with expectancy as he beheld a warrior making for the slope. Only the departure of the leader, Broken Lance, would be signalized by the medicine dance.

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The trapper watched the solitary figure vanish in the growth at the foot of the ridge and then devoted his attention to the camp. Over night the ponies had been brought closer to the teepees, he observed, and he was surprised to discover there was scarcely more than a score of them.

"There oughter be forty more at th' least," he mused. "Must a lost 'em in a runnin' fight when most here. No; not in a runnin' fight, or there'd be some braves missin'. Soljers stampeded 'em while they was campin' in timber. Yep; that's it. Lost their ponies but saved their own hides. It must 'a' been a-mighty close to this place. That oughter mean th' soljers are near."

This thought both pleased and disquieted him. Should he fail in his mission with Broken Lance he would regret the intrusion of any troopers. Did he succeed the troopers could not act too decisively. A slight rustling below his position brought him to attention. Softly crawling beneath the low-hanging boughs of a bushy evergreen he waited. The climax of twelve months' endeavor was upon him. Bushes rasped and crackled near by.

A tall warrior, naked to the clout, and chanting in a guttural voice, burst through the screen. He wore no feathers, nor other insignia, and yet the trapper knew he was Broken Lance. The Ogallala had placed upon him the responsibility for their recent reverses and he was hastening to hide himself in the mountain and to shift the liability to his guiding genius.

Fearing no espionage he made no effort to conceal his movements. So absorbed was he with his song that at times he stumbled. He carried a roll of buckskin under one arm and a bow and three arrows in his right hand. The symbolic arrangement of feathers on the bow and the fresh, red paint on the arrows showed they were not intended for lethal use.

McLean fell in behind, stalking him like a ghost. He had encountered Indians in many places deemed inaccessible by the ordinary frontiersman, gone thither to renew their medicine, and he expected Broken Lance to persevere till high up the peak. He was hugely pleased, therefore, when the chief came to a halt on a narrow plateau, hidden from the plain by a fringe of trees and noisily broken at one end by a mountain torrent.

From his cover the trapper watched the chief gesture his way through a lengthy exhortation. Having finished this preliminary the chief unrolled the buckskin and with every semblance of awe arranged its contents. Next he took the decorated bow and shot an arrow at a cloud bank in the west. McLean had expected him to shoot at the sun. This ceremony puzzled the trapper. He was further perplexed at the Lance's eager bearing as the arrow gracefully described its arc. Even after it fell to earth the chief remained in a tense pose as though listening.

Believing himself free from espionage he allowed free play to his emotions and his dark face was eloquent with chagrin, or fear, as he selected another arrow. This he discharged toward the clouds in the path of the first, and again he strained his attention. McLean now was satisfied it was not the flight of the arrow that absorbed him. Picking up the third arrow he held it high above his head and declaimed rapidly. The trapper pricked his ears in vain to catch some clue. The shooting of the third arrow increased the depression in the somber visage.

"Ain't openin' up well f'r him," murmured the trapper, his own confidence increasing.

The chief proceeded to the next step in his endeavor to propitiate his god. This consisted of a hurried recital addressed to the buckskin smoothed out on the rock. McLean craned his neck and discovered the object was a scalp-shirt, yellow and blue in color to represent the earth and sky, and decorated at the shoulders with bunches of feathers. The side seams and sleeves were fringed with scalps, a gruesome record of the chief's prowess. McLean ransacked his medicine lore in search of a combination that would explain the symbolism of the shirt, the arrows and the clouds.

Broken Lance turned from the rock and with a hoarse shout rushed to the brink of the torrent and with violent gestures derided it. McLean understood this perfectly, so facile is the Indian in pantomimic expression. And had they been two puppets, worked by the same string their movements could not have been more nicely synchronized; for as the chief ran to the stream McLean ran to the rock. As the chief stooped and gathered handfuls of dirt and pebbles and hurled them into the foaming water, so did the trapper bend over the

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scalp-shirt and snatch up two objects from a small roll of skin.

With a final outburst, the contemptuous nature of which could not be misinterpreted, Broken Lance backed from the torrent with slow dancing steps. And as he withdrew the trapper glided back to the scrub growth to examine his loot. A glance was sufficient to inventory the small articles. One was a bit of siliceous rock, the other a piece of lightning-riven cedar. The chief's attitude toward the torrent began to take on meaning.

"He cussed th' water 'cause it's th' enemy of his god," softly murmured McLean as he followed Broken Lance's concluding gestures of disdain. "That means his god must be fire—but not th' sun or he'd shot his arrers at it. Clouds. What fire in clouds? Nothin' but rain an' wind in clouds. Huh! Lightnin'! This rock throws off spark when hit by another rock. Injuns believe a bolt o' lightnin' stored up the sparks in it. An' this cedar was hit by lightnin'.

"He shot arrers at th' clouds an' was some disapp'inted when he didn't hear any thunder, th' voice of his god answerin' him. Th' lightnin'-god!"

The chief slowly turned to the rock. He was still staring aghast at the empty medicine skin on the scalp-shirt when McLean stepped into view.

FOR sixty seconds the two confronted each other, the red man astounded beyond all measure by the double catastrophe of the intrusion and the loss of his symbols, the white man calm and speculative and dominating the tableau because of the rifle resting in the hollow of his left arm.

Yet Broken Lance was the first to speak, his voice trembling as he asked—

"What does the white man want here?"

Speaking slowly in the same dialect, the Teton, the trapper replied—

"Last night the white man slept on his medicine bag."

He held up in his right hand a small pouch made from the skin of a wildcat. Broken Lance eyed it with respect for a moment, then shifted his frantic gaze to the scalp-shirt. McLean continued—

"Near sunrise an owl talked to him and told him to get up."

As the ghosts of the dead talk through the owl and other night-crying birds Broken Lance accepted the words as being a statement of fact, and with increased agitation assented:

"The owl is very wise. He has talked to Broken Lance."

McLean seated himself comfortably on the moss, with his rifle across his lap and covering the chief, and informed—

"My little brother, the owl, told me the mighty chief of the Ogallala Sioux was in this place, seeking something he had lost and that I could come here and find it."

The chief shivered; his eyes rolled wildly as he glanced at his useless bow and then at the trapper's rifle and belted knife. His hand moved towards his own knife, a short and insignificant blade compared with the trapper's twelve inches of steel. Then realizing the hopelessness of resorting to weapons he turned and stared down the mountain as though the intensity of his gaze could bring his warriors to the rescue.

"Broken Lance need not look for help; none will come. Broken Lance has lost his god!" thundered McLean, the muzzle of his rifle restraining the terrified and desperate warrior from his mad impulse to attack.

Although tormented almost to the point of insanity Broken Lance replied:

"A mighty war-chief of the Dakota can not lose his god. The god's medicine is too strong. If I call on him now he will make the white man blind."

He paused to observe the effect of this threat.

McLean snapped his fingers contemptuously and jeered:

"The god of Broken Lance is like a puppy just opening its eyes. It gets lost. Broken Lance has no medicine left to find it. Only the white man's *mahopa* (magic power) can find it."

Convulsed with fury the chief whipped out his knife, but with a laugh and a movement of the rifle McLean halted him, and added:

"When Broken Lance grew to a man and would make a warrior's teepee he went alone high up a mountain and for four days ate no food. For four days he called on the gods to send him a protector. Then he dreamed of lightning——"

"The white man's *mahopa* is a liar!" screamed Broken Lance, falling back, the knife dropping from his hand as the heaped up measure of his ruin overwhelmed him.

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"Dreamed of lightning," quietly repeated McLean. "From that day till this he has carried the fire-rock and the tree-struck-by-lightning with him."

"Lies! lies!" hoarsely panted the chief, gathering himself for a suicidal spring.

McLean did not wish this and raised his hand in compelling restraint, saying:

"Hear the words the owl sent. The god of Broken Lance was mighty till a moon ago. Then he grew sick, for Broken Lance forgot to make him a feast. Ten sleeps ago the Big Knives whipped Broken Lance and his braves. Two sleeps ago, while coming near this mountain, the band of Broken Lance was again attacked and fled to the timber, losing many ponies. The warriors have asked—'Why does the god of Broken Lance grow weak?' Broken Lance told them he would go up in the mountain and make new medicine and make his god strong."

"The white man speaks with a crooked tongue. Broken Lance has lost nothing," mumbled the chief, shivering and wiping the sweat from his brow. "The medicine of Broken Lance is very strong. It can kill a man many sleeps away."

"*Howo!* take your medicine bag and open it four times on me," challenged McLean. "I will not move, nor shoot you."

Broken Lance wilted. Four is the sacred number of the American Indian, having direct relation to the four cardinal points. But a warrior without a god could not benefit by its potentials.

In ultimate despair the chief surrendered—

"The white man has a gun—let him shoot."

"His *mahopa* can slay without a gun," boasted McLean. "But first he will hand back what has been lost." And with a sudden flirt of his right hand he cast the two symbols of the lightning-god upon the scalp-shirt.

With a sharp exclamation Broken Lance leaped to conceal them from view, then fell back. So long as the identity of his god was known it mattered not how much publicity the symbols received. He was renewing his decision to rush the white man and find death when McLean startled him from his purpose by adding—

"It may be the secret of the god may return to the head of the Lance, and no man but the Lance shall know it."

The chief's eyes glittered, but quickly became dull as he heavily asked—

"How can the name come back to Broken Lance once it has dwelt in the white man's head?"

"By the death of the white man before he has a chance to leave the mountain and tell it to others," coolly informed McLean. "Broken Lance shall answer one question. My *mahopa* will know if he answers with a straight tongue. If he does we two will fight. If Broken Lance kills the white man the secret will again live in his head only."

A gleam of hope changed the expression of the savage face, only to be succeeded by bitterness as the chief asked—

"Does the white man fight with a gun?"

"The gun shall be thrown aside. Broken Lance has a knife. So have I."

"It is a very small knife. It is not a fighting knife," said the chief. "It is a skinning-knife."

"He shall have mine and I will take his," was the amazing offer.

Broken Lance straightened and folded his arms across his chest, thinking the white man's god had made him mad, and asked, "What would the white man know?"

"The name of the Sioux chief who lost the skunk-skin from his moccasin, twelve moons ago after killing a small band of Big Knives on the Sweetwater."

Reminiscent gleams sparkled in the Indian's eyes; a mingling of pride and fear. The last because of the suspicion that McLean was connected with that inevitable agency of retribution—the United States cavalry.

"The white man if not a Big Knife is a scout," he ventured, darting a glance at the worn buckskin and the long glossy hair.

"He is neither. He is a trapper."

"Why would he know the name of the chief who led the attack on the Big Knives?"

"He only asks the name of him who lost the skin from his moccasin," corrected McLean.

"Why does he want to know that?"

"Because it is the name of the warrior who took a scalp."

"Many scalps were taken."

"Only one was taken. It was night. The Big Knives were killed by rifle fire. No warrior knew the man he killed except one warrior, the one who lost the skin from his moccasin," patiently replied McLean.

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"Why does the white man ask the name of the warrior who took the scalp?"

"Because his *mahopa* wants that scalp back, or the scalp of the warrior who took it." And the trapper leaned forward and for the first time displayed some of the passion struggling for full expression.

"His *mahopa* is weak without that scalp," shrewdly deduced Broken Lance.

"It is strong enough to steal the god from the head of Broken Lance," was the grim reminder.

Although eager to part with all his earthly possessions could such a sacrifice blot out the white man's knowledge of his tutelary spirit Broken Lance was cautious in his bargaining. Obviously the white man was a friend of the man slain and scalped.

Finally he said:

"It was very dark. The warriors could not see. The scalp taken was very poor."

"——ye! don't ye go for to run down that scalp—ye red dog!" roared McLean in English.

Broken Lance caught the import of this perfectly. As the bargain was yet to be made he hastened to conciliate—

"It was not a good scalp like the white man's." And he pointed admiringly at the long, sleek locks of the trapper.

"Do you trade?" raged the trapper.

"The white man takes the skinning-knife and gives Broken Lance his hunting knife for the name of the warrior who took the scalp on the Sweetwater?" recapitulated the chief.

McLean nodded, his eyes two coals, his fingers trembling over the haft of his knife.

BROKEN LANCE tilted his head high.

"White man," he proudly began, extending his left foot; "it will be written in the Winter counts of my tribe how Broken Lance lost the skunk-skin from his moccasin twelve moons ago. He took the only scalp taken on the Sweetwater."

Dazed by this unexpected intelligence McLean went limp. He had had no doubt but that the chief knew who took the scalp. But the Crow scout had intimated nothing that had caused him to suspect the chief himself was the individual. For a moment or two he was off his guard and the relaxation might have cost him dear had not the chief, suddenly feeling his medicine strong within him, overlooked his advantage in order to strike his chest with his open hand and with genuine dramatic effect loudly recite:

"Ho! White man! Look on Broken Lance, who led the Ogallala on the Sweetwater. Fifteen were killed in the dark night. One scalp was taken. Broken Lance took it! Of all the Ogallala braves he was the only one with eyes like the owl. He saw the man he killed." And for his climax he caught up the scalp-shirt and flaunted it as a banner.

"Is it there?" whispered McLean in English and pointing at the shirt.

The chief ran his fingers down a seam till they paused on a tuft of coarse, wiry hair.

"It is a very poor scalp," he apologized.

"Cuss yer mis'rable hide!" thundered the infuriated trapper, springing to his feet. "That's twice ye've gone out yer way to make game o' that scalp. Hand over that skinnin'-knife, or I'll bore ye."

The long rifle leaped forward. Broken Lance hastily tossed the weapon to the trapper's feet. McLean caught it up and flipped his own blade into the red man's hands. Then throwing his rifle aside he challenged:

"Come on, ye red dog, what tries to make game of honest scalps! Ye jumped a parcel of honest men in the dark 'cause ye was skeered to tackle 'em in th' daylight. I've hunted f'r ye f'r a year. Either ye tote yer secret down th' mountain, or ye stay here while I go to tell th' whole Sioux Nation how yer god was stole from ye."

With a ringing cry of triumph Broken Lance snatched up the scalp-shirt and twisted it round his left arm. Then advancing he began circling his opponent, maneuvering warily and yet confident of victory. McLean reined in his rage and became cool and methodical in meeting the attack. He realized the chief not only had a decided superiority but that he would fight to the death with no thought of retreat; for worse than death would be his portion should the white man carry the secret from the mountain. With the white man dead the identity of the lightning-god would return to the warrior's head. Proper feasts would woo the deity back to his former masterful allegiance.

From the sullen cloud bank came a low rumble of thunder and Broken Lance flamed with fanaticism. Already his god was

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calling encouragement to him. The aspersions cast on the water-god already had won him favor from his guardian spirit. For nothing but the lightning's magic could have induced the white man to part with his long knife.

Twelve months of brooding had prepared the trapper to welcome any handicap so long as he found the warrior he sought. It never entered his head to use his rifle or own knife when he learned Broken Lance was the brave who had lifted the one scalp on the Sweetwater. He had made a bargain, giving his word. His medicine would never be worth strengthening did he withdraw from his offer.

So they slowly moved about, a red circle outside a white, the long knife darting in and out, like stabs of lightning, the skinning-knife revolving in a glittering wheel of fire, after the Mexican fashion, a blazing ambuscade from which the point might leap in mortal thrust at any moment.

"You heard the voice of the lightning-god," taunted Broken Lance, pressing the attack. "It said the white man's *mahopa* is growing weak." And his blade brought blood through a slash in the trapper's buckskin sleeve. "The owl talked the white man into a trap."

"The owl whispered in his ear to bite deep with short teeth," gritted the trapper, locking his blade for a moment under the hilt of the chief's weapon, then darting it inside the guard and ripping a red seam from wrist to elbow.

Broken Lance leaped back, the stinging wound teaching him caution but in no degree lessening his confidence. Now he avoided close quarters and depended on his superior reach, and followed up these tactics for several minutes.

"Did the owl tell the white man how to see without eyes?" he exulted, as his point found an opening and slashed across the puckered forehead.

The thunder growled in approval and Broken Lance yelled joyously and rushed in. Only by the most lively exertions did the trapper keep beyond the sweep of the blade while he mopped the blood from his eyes.

"The lightning-god runs to help Broken Lance," panted the chief, as a dull booming vibrated against the mountain.

"Fool! That's not thunder. Guns are talking," gasped McLean. "The white man's *mahopa* has brought the Big Knives," and there was no mistaking the nature of the detonation now sweeping up the slope. Many guns were being fired in volleys.

For a second Broken Lance wavered, a deathly chilling clutching his heart. The shrill cries of his warriors now blended with the rifle fire and divided his attention. Half blinded by the wound on his forehead McLean knew it was now or never, and his arm shot forward from the center of the glittering circle.

SERGEANT FLETCHER lowered his carbine and stared in amazement and motioned to the men behind him that there was no danger.

"Cussed if he ain't scalped himself!" babbled a trooper.

McLean glanced up and nodded gloomily to the little group. A bandage encircled his forehead while his long, glossy locks lay across his knee. He was endeavoring to cover a red scar on his head with a stiff, wiry mop of hair. Face down on the moss at his feet lay Broken Lance.

As the troopers continued staring the trapper remarked:

"Knew ye'd be up here after BrokenLance their chief, after ye'd cleaned out th' camp. That's Broken Lance there. Me'n him been settlin' a bit o' trouble. His medicine went wrong." Pausing to adjust the scalp in another position he added, "He's been wearin' my ha'r on his scalp-shirt without my say-so. I lost it a year ago on th' Sweetwater an' been gunnin' f'r it ever since. But th' derned thing's warped so it don't seem to fit, nohow."

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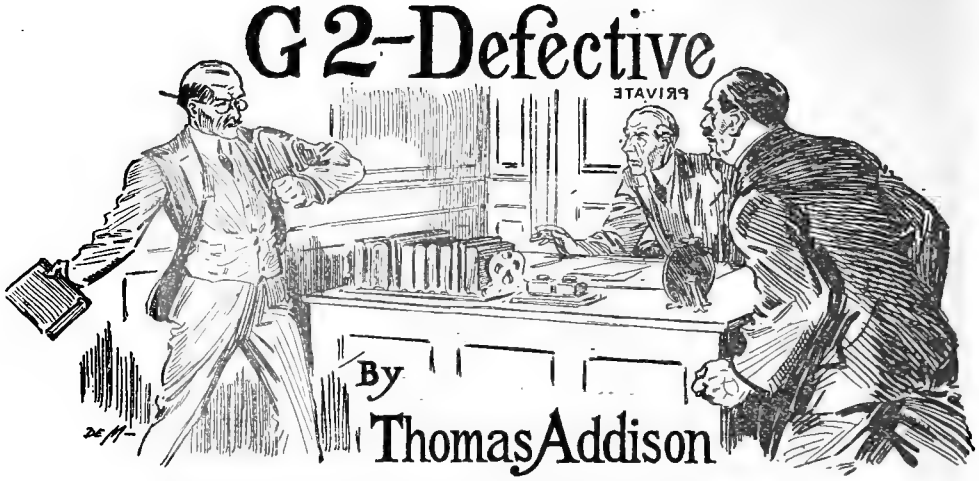
G 2-Defective



By Thomas Addison

Author of "A Tale of Old Shoes," "The Boss of Powderville," etc.

JACOB STUBBS, bookkeeper for Wolfe & Bishop, sat in the little coop he had to himself off the senior partner's office. It was three o'clock of a June afternoon. Jacob, for the fourth or fifth time that day, was frowning over a card that had come to him in the morning's mail at home. It said:

Dear Jake: I am out here helping on a farm, trying to do "my bit." Of course you are doing yours. Write and tell me what it is—Hank.

"Hum," Jacob muttered as he returned the card to his pocket. "Farming is all right for Hank. He isn't fifty yet, and he's got beef and bone, and no one dependent on him. I'm fifty-two, weak-chested, and with a sick wife. A fine chance for me to do anything but stick to these books."

Hank's card troubled Jacob. He would have liked to be able to write him and say that he, too, was doing something for his country. He had bought a Liberty Bond, it was true; but pshaw, that was an investment—good as gold. It wasn't a thing that meant personal sacrifice, such as Hank had taken on. Hank had enough to live on, and liked his ease. To go out and shovel dirt, or whatever they did on a farm, wasn't a light task for a chap who hadn't handled anything heavier than his knife and fork in the last ten years.

Jacob wondered what a man, placed as he was, could do that might be called "his bit"—a gray, spare, undersized weakling whose time wasn't his own, and hadn't been since he could remember. He moiled over his books with this thought pricking in his mind until, through the half-open door, he heard Elliot Bishop surge into Wolfe's room. Bishop was just back from the Quartermaster-General's Department at Washington. There was an exchange of greetings, and Wolfe exclaimed elatedly:

"So you landed it! I got your wire at five yesterday. I rather looked for you on the morning train."

"I wanted a night's rest in a real bed," Bishop told him. "And besides, I had some figuring to do on that contract. It's a rush order. Say, Wolfe, there are no plums in this Government business any more. They make the price, and you meet it or drop out."

"You met it, and did your figuring afterward?" Wolfe's tone betrayed anxious surprise.

"Oh, I played safe all right, but I wanted to see if I couldn't better the bargain. We are allowed a profit of ten per cent., but if we could run in that lot of——"

Bishop stopped at a soft word from his partner, and Jacob heard him cross the room. Bishop peered in at him.

"How are you, Stubbs?" he said suavely. "All well?"

Jacob slid around on his high stool to face him. The junior partner was a middle-aged, thick-set, florid person, with a faint but insistent odor of expensive toilet soap about him.

"Quite well, thank you, Mr. Bishop,"

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Jacob replied. "Hope you had a good trip."

"Fine. Got what I went for." Bishop closed the door, and immediately opened it. "By the way, Stubbs," he remarked "I wish you'd get out your stock book and let me know precisely how much of G 2 stuff we have in warehouse. And the costs. Let us have it as soon as you can, Stubbs."

The door was pulled to. Jacob sat for a while looking out of the window at the building opposite, though it made no conscious picture to his eye. He was thinking of what had passed in the other room. He knew the nature of the contract Bishop had landed with the Government, and he knew the G 2 stock was defective. He was the only one in the office, other than the firm, that did know it. Bishop had bought the line way under the market price for standard goods, and Jacob had wondered what they intended to do with it. Now . . . .

"To the Government!" he ejaculated. "And at a time like this? Why, it's treason! They wouldn't do it."

Nevertheless it was with a sense of foreboding that he took down the stock-book from the rack and set about his task. When he finished he knocked at the door of Wolfe's room, and went in. The partners were together, and Jacob noted that the senior's long, lean face was flushed and worried. Bishop reached out a perfumed hand for the paper.

"Got it done, Stubbs? All right. Thank you."

"G 2—defective," said Jacob stolidly. "Am I to write the lot off as sold?"

A glance passed between Bishop and his partner.

"No!" spoke up Wolfe sharply. "We've had a query for it, that's all."

Bishop made an impatient motion of dismissal, and Jacob returned to his room. Suspicion had become a certainty. Bishop was planning to run the defectives in on the Government. Wolfe was hanging back, but Bishop would win him over. He always did. His was the dominant spirit of the concern. And he was money mad!

"What ought I to do?" Jacob questioned of himself. In the same breath the answer was flashed back—"Your bit. It has come to you."

There was a still moment with him. He had been eight years with Wolfe & Bishop. They had paid him as well as he could expect with younger men willing to work for less. In return he had given them of the best that was in him. So far as they were concerned he could cry them quits. But for himself the question he must face was: where does a man's duty lie when his country pulls one way and his home the other—the very living stones on which it stands? A man of fifty, in an overcrowded trade, has long odds to reckon with when he cuts loose from his job.

"It's for Laura to say; it's her right," he decided.

A glow came into his pale eyes even as he framed the words. He could tell—now—what Laura would say. She was brave. He had known her to laugh out of sheer defiance when pain bit deepest in her tortured limbs.

JACOB arrived at the office ahead of time the next day. He had planned it so. Only the boy was there getting in the ice and dusting off. Jacob opened the safe and looked into the order-book, more to reassure himself than from any other reason, for he had put the book away himself the night before, and there was no Government entry in it. Yet this signified nothing definite.

Bishop could have telephoned the order to the warehouse, leaving the entry to be made when it suited him. It was this thought that had brought Jacob down before hours. He wanted the chance to question Billy Latham, the shipping-clerk. It was a rush order Washington had given. If Bishop had sent it in Billy would make an early start at it.

Jacob went into Wolfe's room and called up the warehouse. Billy himself answered.

"It's Stubbs talking," Jacob said. "Say, Billy, about that Government order phoned in to you yesterday——"

He paused purposely, with a last hope that his fears were unfounded. But Billy snapped out:

"What about it? I'm handling it now. Bishop told me to put it through with bells on."

"Yes, and he neglected to give me a memo. of it," stated Jacob. "What I want to know is whether it calls for all of that G 2 stock. We've a query——"

"Every last case of it," Billy cut in. "Seven hundred and forty-two of 'em. Anything else?"

"No," replied Jacob, and rang off. He looked over the rich surface of the mahogany desk he was sitting at. There was a

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picture on it in a silver frame—Wolfe's youngest daughter with her baby son on her lap.

"I wonder what she would say?" he speculated. His lip curled. "Traitor! And for a few dirty dollars."

He sat a moment longer scowling to himself. Then a grim smile curved his mouth. He drew Hank's postal from his pocket, leaned it carefully against the picture, and got up. He looked into the farther room—Bishop's—and wished he had another card to leave. As he had not, he shrugged defiantly and marched back into his own room. But he left the door ajar; he wanted to know when Wolfe came in.

Bishop was down first. Jacob glimpsed him sorting the mail at his desk. After a time Bishop strode into his partner's room with a handful of letters. And then he was very still. Jacob knew that he had caught sight of the card and was reading it. On this Wolfe entered.

"Here is something I found propped up on your daughter's photograph," Jacob heard Bishop say.

Stillness again. Wolfe was reading the card. Jacob slid down from his stool. He was pale, and a little frightened; but he walked in on the partners with a steady step.

"I placed that on your desk, Mr. Wolfe," he said calmly, and waited.

Something prompted Bishop to close the door to the outer office. Wolfe had neglected to do it.

"Well, why did you put it there, Stubbs?" demanded Wolfe. "It appears to be an entirely personal matter."

"I intended it as a reminder, Mr. Wolfe," said Jacob with the same strange composure.

"Ah!" The exclamation was from Bishop. "I begin to understand, Wolfe."

The senior motioned him to be quiet. A dull color had come to his lean jowls.

"As a reminder of what, Stubbs?" he questioned glacially.

"That we've each our bit to do. Send the card to your daughter. Ask her what she'd have her boy do, when his day comes, if his country were relying on him in her hour of need."

They were standing, Bishop at one end of the broad desk, Jacob at the other, and Wolfe at his chair. Wolfe sat down abruptly.

"You are impertinent, Stubbs," he said. "Get back to your work."

Jacob laughed, as men do when going into battle. Fear sat no longer in his heart. Laura scorned a slacker—she had said so. But before he could answer Bishop, the junior partner, spoke. His voice was amazingly soft and smooth.

"Just a moment, Mr. Stubbs. Am I wrong in the surmise that you have been talking with the warehouse?"

"No."

"Ah! And did you mention to Latham?"

"I did not. I simply asked if he was sending out the G 2 stock. He doesn't know it is defective. That's between us three."

"Exactly, Mr. Stubbs. Just the three of us."

Bishop nodded at him pleasantly. His voice was, if possible, even softer and smoother than at first. He turned to his partner.

"You hear, Mr. Wolfe? Mr. Stubbs is discreet. It seems to me that we have delayed rather long in showing our appreciation of his very excellent work here. I'm afraid he has thought hardly of us."

Wolfe glanced up at Jacob. The little bookkeeper's face had taken on a singularly intent expression. It was as though he were waiting for something to occur. And Jacob was waiting, with a cold, sickening disgust growing in him."

"Bishop!" cautioned Wolfe.

But his partner, arguing from premises that to him were beautifully sound, and misreading the look in Jacob's eyes, went on.

"BUSINESS is business, Stubbs, all the time. If we don't make a dollar when we can the next man will. You get me, of course. Now with regard to yourself. Suppose we raise you five a week. Eh? And give you a little bonus—say a couple of hundred spot cash. How would you like that, my dear fellow?"

Jacob's hand was resting on a stout volume of trade reports on the desk by him. His fingers tightened on it.

"How would I like it?" he rasped through his set teeth. "First-rate, Bishop—if I could only sell my honor with less thought than a corner fakir sells his swindling wares. First-rate, Wolfe—if I could play my country false and hold a daughter's love and esteem. Show me how to do

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these things and I will take your bribe."

Silence followed. The two men stared at the small, spare figure confronting them; it was drawn up scornfully erect. The color ebbed from the junior's florid face. The senior's was washed gray.

"Why, curse me, it—it's impossible!" stuttered Bishop, recovering painfully from the paralysis that had gripped his tongue. Stubbs defying them! He could not believe his eyes or ears.

Wolfe waved a hand at Jacob.

"Get out!" he said thickly.

"Not till I've had my say," Jacob shot at him. "It's understood that I've resigned. I'm my own man—more so than either of you, for you've sold yourselves to the devil. Wait! Will you hear me in private, or will you have them all in?"

Bishop, who had started for him, stopped short.

"Get through," he muttered, and fell back to his end of the desk. Jacob proceeded.

"I hoped when I came down this morning that you hadn't ordered out that stock. I couldn't believe you'd cheat the country that had given you birth, sheltered you, protected you, made you rich. I hoped it for the honor of the house. I'd be a stone if I hadn't developed some sort of attachment for it, for I've been here eight years.

"But now—I can't cut loose from it quick enough. It's the graveyard of loyalty. You would send those defectives to the front at the cost, perhaps, of brave men's lives. God! You can pity a coward for the fear he feels. But a traitor—hell itself hasn't room for him!"

Wolfe was sunk down in his seat, his eyes seeking an unaccusing spot to rest on. The man was in the grasp of a mounting dread shot through with a flame of shame.

With Bishop it was different. The blood boiled into his face. He saw red. An oath spurted from him, and he charged wickedly at Jacob. But he did not arrive. The book of trade reports met him half-way, hurled with all the force Jacob could put into it. It caught Bishop on the chin. He reeled under the blow, staggered blindly backward. Only the wall saved him from measuring his length on the floor.

It was Jacob's big moment, the one blazing period in all his drab years. An umbrella leaned in the corner near him. He seized it, and brandished it militantly above his head. Wolfe had jumped up from his chair.

"Come on!" Jacob barked. "Come on, you treason-breeding, back-alley sneak thieves! It's Atlanta for you two. You would claim you didn't know the goods were defective if they found you out—but you forget me. I *know!*"

"Mr. Stubbs! The outer office. For God's sake—" Wolfe's voice was an agonized whisper.

Jacob wheeled on him.

"There's just one way to save yourself. Call up Latham and stop that shipment."

Wolfe hung in the wind. He was, in reality, dazed by the happenings that had been heaped on him. Jacob put action into him.

"Move quick!" he whipped out. "I'm done talking. The next you hear will be from an information I'll lodge against you."

Wolfe, stammering his willingness to obey, took up the telephone and stopped the shipment. Jacob looked around at Bishop. He was tottering through the door to his room, his hands nursing his battered chin.

"I guess," said Jacob softly to himself, "I can answer that card of Hank's now."

He went out with a smile, and home to Laura. On the morrow he would start in to hunt another job.

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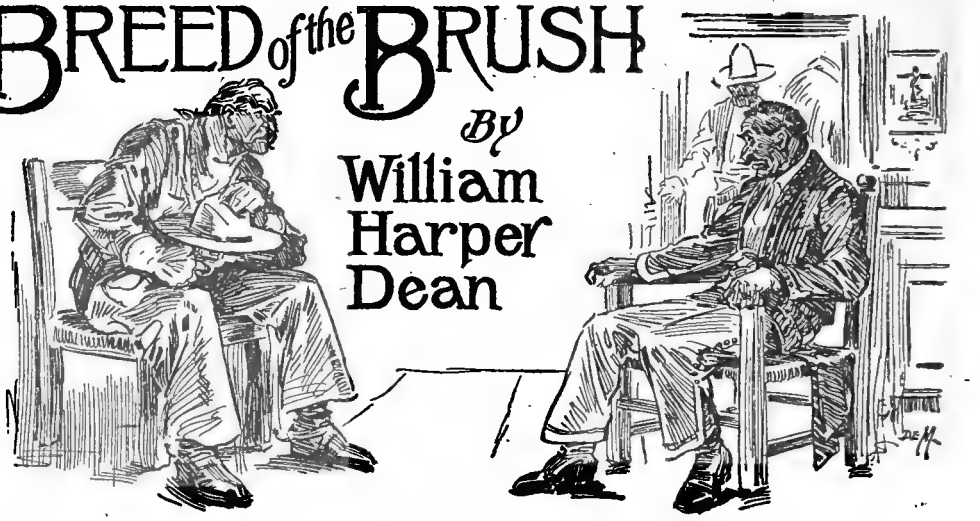
BREED of the BRUSH

By William Harper Dean



AGES before Pete Lanahan's legs had bowed to the curvature of his pony's ribs and his hair whitened by sixty frostless Winters, Texas had placed her everlasting stigma upon the weather-prophet. In Texas a weather-eye brands the fool and the newcomer. A native Texan has no such property to declare. And though Pete Lanahan was neither fool nor newcomer, at the discreet age of sixty he had committed the unpardonable sin: he had made a weather prophecy.

But Billings, foreman of the Triangle-Y, was the fool. He had staked the salvation of the starving herds on Pete's prophecy that by all the sun demons of the desert, rain would come and that right soon.

And so it came about that at this moment the loud-swearing foreman was with the Triangle's herds some forty miles back in the Borillas where the slat-ribbed animals had been driven at the eleventh hour to fill madly with grass and water.

And that is how it came about that for three days after the disgusted outfit had fled the kingdom of Pete's unfulfilled prophecy, that individual had been riding alone through the tinder-dry brush, doing penance in the form of salvaging the "downs" that were too weak from hunger and thirst to follow the herds to deliverance.

But now as Pete rode down the griddle-hot trail that twisted through the chaparral, no salvaged steers coursed ahead of him. Time and again in those three days the short, heavy rifle sheathed against his saddle had crashed mercifully through the white-hot silence to relieve a gaunt, weaving steer of the tortures of a border drought.

By day now, vultures flapped and wheeled over his trail; under a dry moon, coyotes yapped and fought over the drought's offerings.

Pete's head drooped mournfully as he rode; it was an inglorious end to his forty years of brush-riding.

"We're a pair o' ol' fools, Lucy," he muttered; "but we ain't goin' to the Borillas—hear me! We ain't goin' where they c'n call us that. We're goin' to the Panhandle soon's we settle with ol' Miguel!"

The piebald mare cocked her one good ear—screw-worms had found the scratch in the other ear before Pete had—and snorted through the slow-rising white dust.

"But I swear I did feel rain in the air!"

He reined up and took a pull at his canteen. Then he lifted his soft, drooping Stetson and went through the motions of one mopping his forehead. But there was no moisture on any living thing in that bone-dry air.

When he lifted his hat it was to reveal a countenance both hard and yet softened by a wealth of humor that lurked about the corners of his blue eyes. His was a veritable buzzard's-bill of a nose; his mouth a thin, straight gash. His skin was weathered to the hue of his worn brush leather. Close-cropped, his white hair accentuated the darkness of his features.

As once more he went through the motions of mopping his brow, Lucy's good ear

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shot forward inquiringly. She snorted. Pete listened. Then he heard it above the sluggish *chuck, chuck* of a wagon somewhere ahead in the trail. It came twice before his puckered brow unwrinkled with understanding. It was a child's voice.

"Thunder!" he grunted, curiosity mingled with disgust; "let's see it, Lucy."

He lifted the reins, and the piebald, as though equally curious, spurted round the bend in the trail.

AT THE turn Pete caught sight of the wagon, a dust-covered schooner, loaded at the sides with the bulky impedimenta of a rancher's outfit. Chairs and a dismantled bed there were, pots and kettles. A lantern swung from the rear axle-tree, banging the head of a tongue-lolling hound that made no effort to dodge its pendulum swing as he staggered along in the hot shade beneath the schooner.

Pete reined up beside the man who walked along with the team of great, patient oxen.

"Ev'nin'," greeted Pete.

Whereupon the oxen with one accord stopped short, slowly knelt and lay panting in their yokes. The hound flopped in his tracks to rise immediately with a yelp of pain as his body touched the roasting white sand in the trail.

"Ev'nin'," returned the man.

He was a lanky, black-bearded fellow, barefoot, in red flannel undershirt and tattered hat.

"Hot, ain't it?" he observed, eying Pete's canteen.

Pete did not answer. He turned in his saddle to look into the schooner. In the midst of the hot packs sat a woman with a child huddled in her arms. Pete thought she looked very young to be a mother, despite the blue lines under her dark eyes. The child stirred and moaned feverishly. The mother looked at Pete dumbly.

"Pretty hot," replied Pete, turning quickly to the man; "baby sick?"

The fellow nodded but did not shift his eyes from the canteen.

"Lost her cow an' condensed milk ain't agreein' with it."

Pete dismounted and passed the canteen in to the woman.

"It's cool," he said.

She seized it and put it to the child's lips. It tasted the water and began to cry. The woman shook her head and drank deep. When she extended the canteen the barefoot man, whose eyes had remained glued to the thing, seized it. When he handed it back to Pete it was empty.

"Thanks," he gasped, wiping his mouth on the back of a dust-covered hand; "how far's it to Banderol?"

"'Bout four mile—headed there?"

"Uh-huh," replied the driver, "she's goin' to camp there a day or so then she's headed slap across the United States—to Pittsburg or some such place, seems."

"She! Ain't you goin' too?" said Pete.

The driver shook his head and called loudly to the oxen. The great beasts rose slowly to their feet and pressed against the yokes through the eternal heat. Pete walked along, the bridle over his arm.

"I ain't her man," explained the fellow in a low voice. "She's from 'cross the river. Her husband had trouble with the greasers an' disappeared, seems. Then along comes a gang o' these bandits, takes over her little ranch an' gives her marchin' orders for 'cross the line."

It was but a worn chapter of an old story. But Pete inclined his head to catch every syllable of it, how her man had acquired a small ranch across the line, how the chaotic days had come when lawlessness ran like red quicksilver through the revolution-wracked republic, how her man had disappeared after a quarrel with roving bandits, how she and her child and her few belongings had been spared to make her weary exodus from the land of broken promises.

"Does she know what band it was?" asked Pete slowly, looking down at the glaring sand.

"Does she?—well, who else could it 'a' been in those parts but that ol' hellion Losaya! Miguel Losaya—you know him."

"Losaya!"

Pete stared at the man incredulously.

"Must be some mistake there, pardner. Miguel Losaya an' me's been friends ever since I been ridin' brush—nigh on forty years. I sell him cattle for the Triangle-Y every year, go over to his ranch alone, even since this rucus started in Mexico. Naw-suh, some mistake there sure's you born. I'd trust ol' Miguel anywhere!"

The man halted the oxen and walked back to the schooner.

"Wasn't it ol' Miguel Losaya?" he said, poking in his head.

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Pete saw the woman nod slowly in dry-eyed misery.

"You sure, lady?" said Pete. "You sure you know Miguel when you see him? Lady, I sell Miguel cattle every year. He's got a bunch o' twenty head o' the Triangle's I'm goin' to collect for this very day. You sure 'twas Miguel?"

There was no doubting the woman's story. When it was told, Pete nodded slowly. His face was as gray as the dust clinging to his eyebrows.

He climbed into his saddle and turned the piebald back upon the trail.

Surely this was his day of days and the bitter irony of its happenings burned like acid. Today he was the laughing-stock of the Triangle and every man in Banderol.

He knew he could never live down the story how he, a native Texan, in his dotage had dared make a weather prophecy and had missed it. That in itself was cause sufficient to drive him from the brush.

But now a fresh pain entered his old heart; Miguel, old Miguel, had betrayed the trust that all these years Pete had placed in him. The moaning cry of the child back there in the schooner rang in his ears. Somewhere under his old ribs there surged a sensation utterly new. In all his solitary, narrow life Pete had never felt as now. He touched the piebald with the spurs, blinked hard and cleared his throat.

Straight through the brush he rode and reined up at the perpendicular bank of the Rio Grande that ran sluggishly past, for this was the season of drought. Below him were the shallows through which so often he had ridden the piebald behind the herds that Miguel bought.

Across the river and an hour through the nether chaparral lay Miguel's ranch, where the shrewd old Mexican counted his fat cattle by the hundred as they grazed contentedly over his irrigated pastures.

Pete set his jaw and urged Lucy down the steep trail to the water's edge. She knew the shallows and he gave her the lines. Ten minutes later she clambered up on the other side and made her way straight through the Mexican chaparral.

WHEN he emerged from the brush that screened Miguel's ranch from the river-front, Pete reined up and swept his blue eyes over the herds in the lush grass of Miguel's irrigated fields. They were fat—all of them, and the twenty head bearing the Triangle-Y brand had been transformed from gaunt, hungry-eyed creatures to the like of Miguel's own sleek stock.

Pete nodded his approval. Then he caught sight of a little group of sombrero-crowned peons standing before Miguel's adobe.

For an instant Pete hesitated, then he touched the spurs against the piebald's flanks and raced across the intervening space. Lucy sprawled all four legs and skidded to a dusty halt not five feet from the group.

It was a silent, sullen half-dozen peons, ragged and barefoot, who faced him. Pete noted with sudden interest and disgust that across each ragged shirt-front was crossed a well-filled cartridge-belt and that in the hollow of each arm rested a rifle. He knew these fellows for Miguel's peons.

"Well, you dressed-up scarecrows, where's your master?" called Pete.

The door of the spacious adobe opened. Miguel Losaya walked out and swept his tremendous velvet-covered sombrero in a gesture of exaggerated humility. He was a splendid-looking fellow, with his white hair and mustache, glistening teeth and rich coppery skin. He wore white shirt and trousers. About his waist was wound a red silken sash the ends of which reached nearly to the ground.

Pete dismounted and slipped the bridle over his arm.

"Miguel," he said, approaching the smiling rancher, "what's all this monkey-business?"

He indicated the stolid armed peons.

"Ah, does not the Señor Humdeenger understand?"

Miguel's eyes were dark live coals, though his teeth were flashing white in a cynical leer.

Pete started. Never had old Miguel so addressed him.

"Not a —— bit, he don't—what's wrong with you! Don't you know my name?"

Pete's fingers quivered strangely. Then he glanced at the armed peons and changed his mind.

"Ah," said Miguel, "do not the *Americanos* across the reever speak of Señor Lanahan, the humdeenger? His fame has spread across the border—yes?"

"Oh, all right," said Pete huskily; "guess

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you've got a right to call me what you want. Well, I jest came over to collect for them last twenty head—lemme see, at twenty each that's four hundred. Lord, I wouldn't 'a' recognized them slat-ribbed things if I hadn't 'a' seen their brands. Must a' put on ten pounds a day. Fine grazin', Miguel, this."

The old Mexican had not altered his expression. He grinned patiently until Pete had finished.

"The grazing will be better across the reever when the humdeenger breeng the rain—yes?"

Swifter than the dart of a rattler's head old Pete's hand went to his hip. Miguel Losaya's last breath would have been spent in a joke at the expense of Pete Lanahan, had the latter's lean hand encountered what it sought.

But it did not. Pete had long ago forsworn the embellishment of a gun, and yet now his hand had instinctively sought it. He paused. His rifle was sheathed on the saddle. His chance was gone.

Miguel ignored the raging flames that scorched through the copper coating of Pete's cheeks. He shrugged his shoulders and spread open his palms.

"Last week a dear *Americano amigo* would keel me queek—like Señor Humdeenger. Instead, I, Miguel Losaya—ah, well!"

Miguel finished the explanation with a shrug of his shoulders that might have meant anything.

"The Señor Humdeenger see his wife and *miña*—so? They cross the reever soon ago."

"I saw 'em," choked Pete, his blue eyes narrowed to cold sparks. "I saw 'em an' swore it wasn't Miguel Losaya what did it. But I reckon you've gone crazy like the rest o' this country. Pay me an' lemme go!"

Miguel wheeled to the group of motionless peons. A torrent of bastard Spanish flowed from his lips. Pete heard and understood. With a single leap he gained the saddle and bent low as Lucy, as though interpreting the quick movements of the peons, shot for the chaparral.

A ragged volley of rifle-shots came wopping from the rear. The bullets whined about Pete and went *thucking* into the ground about, kicking up little geysers of white sand. A moment more and he gained the cover of the brush. The firing ceased.

Pete rode hard until he gained the American shore and was once more in the brush.

THAT afternoon Billings and four of his riders had returned from the Borillas to Banderol. When they had left Banderol it had been to get the staggering steers to the hills before they dropped in their tracks. This feat having been accomplished, they rode back to wind up what affairs needed such attention. For until the rainy season the Triangle-Y proposed to remain with its herds in the hills.

Billings and his riders lounged in the burning shade of the porch of the Crystal Fountain saloon, an unpainted wooden structure whose shingles were curling beneath the merciless sun.

In better days the Fountain had been an emporium of unrestricted hilarity goaded to frenzy by a thundering hurdy-gurdy much out of tune. But the long drought had come, the border cattle had gone to the hills and business was dead. All Banderol that could find no business in the hills lay dormant in the heat.

"Mexico's on fire, they say, but this place's burnt up," observed Billings from his seat on an empty beer-keg. "Anybody here seen Lanahan?"

A snicker ran through the little group on the porch.

"Out prayin' for rain, I reckon, unless he's jumped the country," offered a rider.

"Wouldn't blame him much," said Billings; "he'll never live long enough to hear the last o' this."

"But what gets me," said one of his riders, with a dry grin, "is why you kept hangin' on here waitin' for rain just because ol' Pete swore it was comin'. Seems to me this rain joke's got a back kick to it."

Billings grinned sheepishly.

"That's all right for you fellows, but if you'd known Pete long's me, you'd listened too. When a man that ain't committed himself to the weather for forty years takes a shot at it, full realizin' the consequences of a miss, it's worth noticin'. Judas Priest! here he comes now!"

Out from the brush rode Pete, head down. He did not look up until Lucy brought up at the Fountain's porch.

"Hi, Pete!" said Billings. "Thought we'd better ride back an' stock up the outfit with slickers an' gum boots. What'd you'd find in the brush?"

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"They're all dead," replied Pete, alighting and walking stiffly on his bow legs to the porch. "What wasn't down was about to go down an' I helped 'em along."

He took off his hat and ran his lean fingers through his white hair. "Any o' you got a extra gun to loan me for a little while?"

Somebody laughed.

"'Tain't loud enough, Pete; better try a stick o' dynamite. They say that'll jar rain loose quicker'n a forty-four."

"That'll do!"

Pete's blue eyes were sparkling.

"Somebody loan me a gun: I've got some business 'cross the border."

"Oh, what's happened to the law-abidin' citizen," gruffed Billings. "You give up packin' a hip gun five years ago. You think you'll have to stick up Miguel for the money? You're gettin' distrustful in your ol' age—an' other things!"

Without a word Pete climbed back into the saddle and passed down the road that divided Banderol into two equal parts. The group on the porch craned their necks and watched him until he passed from sight behind the blacksmith's shop.

The sun was setting in crimson fury when Pete rode slowly past the Fountain in the direction of the brush. At his side was strapped a huge forty-four. He looked very old, thought Billings, who watched him, what with his drooping head and his gray hair touched with the crimson light.

"Oh, Pete; we're leavin' in the mornin'. Comin' along?"

"You'll be about town tonight, won't you?" called back Pete. "I want to see you later."

"Look here," said Billings, turning to the group of grinning riders, "we've got to let up on Pete. He's gettin' ol' an' it's tellin' on him. Let's forget it!"

TONIGHT Miguel Losaya was in rare good-humor. He had eaten heartily of an excellent meal prepared by his coolie, and having eaten had lighted a particularly good cigar and strolled out to gaze contentedly at his fat cattle, now in their corrals. For of late Miguel had reason to know that a corral was the safest place for stock after nightfall.

Now he sat in the office-room of his comfortable adobe and fairly exuded silent philosophy with the blue smoke of his cigar.

For three years now the republic had fought with itself while fortunes changed hands overnight as rulers were deposed or simply "dismissed" by factions that forgot to mention the whereabouts of the erstwhile defactos. Miguel Losaya coveted none of the booty which at such times fell to the lot of the conquerors; he was too shrewd a body to affiliate with any faction.

He found it much more profitable and vastly safer to maintain a strict neutrality to factions and factors alike. Tomorrow a brigand chief, scouring the desert with his horde of human falcons, might stop with Miguel and be fed and directed to the weakest point in the lines of the enemy.

And the following day the commander of the enemy might stop with Miguel long enough to receive a royal welcome and explicit directions how to annihilate the bandit troop.

Miguel Losaya's tried-and-true policy was when traitors came, to cling to traitors, when patriots came, to cling to patriots, and when traitors and patriots both came, to cling to his horse.

It paid. Tonight he had counted himself wealthier by twenty fat steers acquired of the Triangle-Y at a time when collectors from the other side of the Rio Grande on the whole were content to charge such accounts to profit and loss.

And then there were the half-dozen steers, the milch cow and three head of horses belonging to the American rancher who had disappeared and whose wife and child were even then camping in Banderol.

Miguel smiled a rich, buttered smile and rubbed his sleek palms together. After all, he reasoned, with an expressive shrug of his shoulders, it was a poorly managed reign of anarchy that brought nobody gain.

And he chuckled aloud at the recollection of his interview that afternoon with old Pete Lanahan. The latter had looked so thoroughly dumfounded at the swift turn in the behavior of his old friend Miguel!

He wished Lanahan no particular harm—he had not intended that the peons should fire to kill—yet he resented Lanahan's subsequent indifference to the great change in relations between the people on opposite sides of the river.

He could not conceive how Lanahan, knowing him, Miguel Losaya, for a loyal Mexican, could presume in the face of the present state of affairs to come unbidden to

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his ranch and demand settlement of an obligation contracted within the last three years. It was preposterous!

He chuckled afresh and turned in his chair to gape into the muzzle of a tremendous revolver. Old Pete stood behind it, his free hand brushing the dust from his eyebrows.

"Ev'nin'," said Pete wearily.

He dropped into a chair and covered Miguel with the gun-hand resting on his knee.

"I'd 'a' come out o' the brush sooner but your peons was hangin' about this house too promiscuous. Now don't let go any yells: this here's a borrowed gun an' the fellow that loaned her to me has filed down the trigger somethin' awful. She went off in my hand twice before I got the hang o' her. I ain't sure I got it yet!"

The Mexican's face turned a sickly pallor as he gazed at the great caliber of the gun and realized that as Lanahan talked his bony finger actually was touching that trigger.

Pete took off his big hat and placed it carefully over the gun hand on his knee. Only the black muzzle peeped from under the brim.

"If one o' your peons comes in or anybody, jest explain that you an' Señor Humdeenger is talkin' business—don't forget!"

Losaya's lips twitched. He could not tear his eyes away from that black rim.

"Miguel," said Pete in a low voice, resthis back wearily, "I'm gettin' old. I know it now 'cause today I've been all cut up. I feel tired enough to go to sleep right here—don't worry, though; 'cause if I did this gun'd be bound to let go. I have to watch her all the time.

"As I was sayin', I'm gettin' old an' just t'other day I decided to quit the brush for good an' go where there's a nice easy job waitin' for me up in the Panhandle. Jest ridin' fence lines, Miguel, an' that on the open prairie. No brush—no nothin'. Takes a young feller to ride brush like she ought to be rode. You know that.

"An' that's one reason I came over today. I wanted to talk over ol' times with you an' say so-long. Co'se I had to collect a little money, too. An' then, Miguel, I wanted to hear you say 'twasn't you that druv that woman 'cross the river.

"You see, Miguel, me an' you's been friends for nigh forty years—wonder how many head o' cattle we've traded for! An' darn it! I always trusted you!"

Pete paused. Very slightly the corners of his mouth twitched and he swallowed.

"You know some fellers don't make many friends, Miguel, an' what few they do make they like to swing on to. That's the way I always felt about you. But you've sure hamstrung my faith in human natur'.

"Anyway, what I want to say is this. I guess I'd 'a' called it square about the twenty head, 'cause times is different now on both sides the river, an' maybe I'd forget about your affair with that rancher, 'cause it happened in your country an' I ain't heard both sides of the story.

"But, Miguel, you sure did upset the beans when you joshed me about that rainmakin' business. You got personal then! So I been doin' some hard thinkin'.

"I been thinkin' bein's I'm quittin' the brush for keeps I'd better leave her with a clean slate. First I'm goin' to ask you to hand over that four hundred for the twenty head, then for the trouble you've made me collectin' it I'll drive 'em back 'cross to Texas. An' now man to man, how many acres in that feller's place you've took up with? How many?"

Pete gave the muzzle of the forty-four the slightest elevation. The ball would have drilled Miguel straight between the eyes.

"Señor, it was but feefty," muttered Miguel thickly.

"Fifty, eh? Well, it wasn't worth much, bein's he didn't have irrigation. So we'll just call it square for fifty head o' your fattest. That means 'bout two thousand dollars at the lowest an' that ought to help the woman right sharp. You savvy me, Miguel?"

The latter was nodding. Pete lowered the muzzle; the ball would have caught Miguel in the pit of his stomach. He flinched and went green with nausea at the thought.

"Now listen real careful an' remember about this fool trigger. Call one o' your peons by his name—go ahead!"

Twice Miguel called "Pedro!" but his husky accents did not carry beyond the room.

"Louder—like you was mad with him!"

"Pedro!" shrilled Miguel.

"*Si, señor!*" came the answering shout through the open window.

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"Tell him—quick! Señor Lanahan an' me are friends again. I have sold him much cattle. All o' you saddle an' we will drive them over the river—quick! no monkey business; I know every darned word o' your lingo!"

Miguel, his eyes glued to the black muzzle, bawled the order word for word.

"Now tell him they mustn't pack no guns; tell him Señor Lanahan won't promise 'em safe unless they leave their firearms."

Again Miguel bellowed, through the window.

"*Si, señor!*" came the answer from without.

Pete waited. He could hear the high-pitched accents of the peons out in the corral as they saddled their ponies.

FIVE minutes passed. Then the sound of a rider approaching the open door.

"Tell him," said Pete in a low voice, "to cut out my twenty head an' fifty o' your best an' drive 'em 'cross. We'll follow."

The peon had dismounted and was standing in the open door, tattered straw sombrero and the bridle lines in one hand. Furtively he eyed Pete. With a movement as quick as it was efficient Pete touched the brim of his hat with one finger of his left hand.

It slid completely over the black muzzle. Pete caught the hopeful gleam in Miguel's eyes and elevated his own eyebrows in unmistakable warning.

Miguel hesitated, then, his eyes fastened upon that terrible hat, he instructed the peon.

The peon nodded and disappeared. Pete pulled back the hat brim and waited until he heard the sound of cattle being driven from the corrals.

"Now," he said, rising, bracing the leveled gun against his hip, "jest hand over the four hundred."

Miguel rose and started in the direction of the desk.

"Wait a minute!" called Pete. He crossed the room with his worn leather chaps flapping his bowed legs and pressed the ugly muzzle against the small of Miguel's back.

"Maybe there's a gun in that desk as well as money. I don't hardly reckon you want to take any chances with it, do you?"

Dumbly the Mexican unlocked a drawer. Pete felt Miguel's muscles twitching beneath the close-pressed muzzle. In the open drawer lay a robust automatic atop a bundle of bank-notes.

"Just go ahead," urged Pete.

Miguel hesitated the fraction of a second. Then very carefully his fingers clasped the edge of the bundle of notes and drew them from under the automatic. He closed the drawer and locked it.

"Count 'em," said Pete.

Miguel counted out four hundred dollars and extended the bills. Pete stepped back and took them with outstretched left hand. He jammed them into his hip pocket.

"Now put the rest in your own pocket, walk straight to the door an' straight to the brush. My pony's there."

With the insistent muzzle pressing against his back, Miguel obeyed. With one hand Pete unitched the piebald and motioned to Miguel to mount. The latter did so as Pete held the bridle in one hand and kept the muzzle against the Mexican's ribs.

"Now listen; we're goin' to ride double tonight. Take your foot out o' that left stirrup—that's it! I'm goin' to jump behind. Don't try anything, Miguel. My Gawd! it takes all my strength to keep this trigger from slippin'!"

Pete grasped the saddle and with left foot in the stirrup sprang to his seat behind the silent Miguel.

"Now jest drive down to the river—listen! I hear the cattle takin' the water now. Drive down—slowly! an' follow behind the riders."

Neither spoke as the astounded piebald picked her way over the starlit trail through the chaparral and finally entered the shallows. Pete looked down at the water to see the reflection of the stars wavering in the depths like so many flickering little torches.

Suddenly he raised his head and stared northward through the darkness. Something, he knew not what, made him do this. And as he stared a molten yellow artery seared its pulsing course to earth and a deep-throated growl rumbled through the night.

"My Gawd!" gasped Pete under his breath.

"Miguel, did you see that?—that's lightnin'! Maybe it's goin' to rain, Miguel, an' things will be better on this side o' the river, as you said today!"

The Mexican maintained his silence.

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They had crossed the river behind the plunging cattle and shouting riders and now were making through the American chaparral while drivers and driven crashed on ahead.

"Tell you what, Miguel, long's it's tryin' to rain maybe I c'n help matters some. They uster say when I was a boy that if you hung a crow—a live crow, Miguel—by his left foot, rain was bound to come. Co'se the trouble was gettin' the live crow—sorter like ketchin' the rabbit, you know.

"But I've been thinkin' an' seems like I've just about placed you, Miguel. Crows is pretty onery animals—they jest hang 'roun' an' pick on somethin' that's down—like a broken-legged sheep or such. Yessuh, I believe I c'n help some if it comes to that!"

A second flash of lightning and a more distinct peal of thunder. Pete chuckled aloud. At that moment they emerged from the brush and Banderol's cluster of dim lights lay before them.

The Mexican riders had stopped and were waiting behind the cattle in the open. One called shrilly to Miguel for orders: they feared to enter the town.

"Tell 'em to start the cattle a-goin' on the road to town an' then cut back home. I won't say for 'em if they ride into town," said Pete to Miguel.

Miguel repeated the order. The riders drove the cattle forward until the animals were on a swinging trot down the wide road. Then with a thudding of hoofs the riders scuttled to the shelter of the brush.

Miguel sat still on the halted piebald awaiting orders. When the last sound of the vanished riders had died away in the brush, Pete sheathed the big gun and drew a deep sigh.

"Now it's jest me an' you, Miguel," he said; "like it uster be."—A gush of hot wind and a brighter flash.—"It's comin', Miguel; I don't need any crow. Get down!"

The Mexican slipped from the saddle. Pete followed. In the heavy darkness, now and then illuminated with flashes of the on-rushing storm, the two men stood facing each other.

"Miguel, this is so-long for keeps now an' I sure am sorry it ain't like I'd hoped it'd be. But then I guess me an' you is different, Miguel. I reckon we jest naturally don't understand each other."

Pete's right hand was extended. A vivid flash of lightning illuminated the strange scene and then snapped out. But in that instant Pete had interpreted the sudden catlike movement of the Mexican. He leaped backward as his hand flashed to his hip. But Miguel's hand had thrust.

Pete staggered under the blow and went to his knees. A pain as if from a bar of white-hot steel shot through his very soul. A sizzling blue firework blinded him and a cataclysmic crash that seemed to destroy the very heavens drove him face down to earth. Somehow through the chaos of ebbing senses he was conscious that rain was descending in torrents.

BILLINGS, dangling his legs over the edge of the porch of The Crystal Fountain, was still commenting on the fact that it had thundered twice. A rider with his back propped against an empty beer-keg was squeezing a doleful air from a battered accordion.

"If it did come," said Billings to the group at large, "I'd walk right up to Pete an' apologize in front o' all Banderol."

"If you could find him," supplemented the musician, throwing aside the accordion and rolling a cigaret. "What you reckon's keepin' him, anyway?"

"Gawd knows—what's them steers doin' loose!"

Looming against the faint light from the Fountain a herd was passing slowly down the road that ran fifty feet from the porch.

Billings jumped to his feet.

"Them's fat steers! Cut in, you fellows, an' keep 'em goin' till I find out!"

And as half a dozen riders scrambled into their saddles and shot behind the wandering herd, Billings stared agape at the sight of Pete's piebald walking sedately through the yellow glow. She came to a stop before the porch, her saddle empty.

PETE LANAHAN'S first impression on opening his eyes was that he alone had survived the great flood. The thunder of torrents was in his ears, the spray of water was in his face and the smell of it in his nostrils. Water—water, rain—rain!

He smiled. And then he felt the destroying pain in his shoulder and opened his eyes in rational understanding. He lay stretched upon the Fountain's porch, a padded saddle

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under his head. All about him raged the storm.

Billings was holding a lantern as he knelt over Pete and prodded the shoulder that was on fire.

"It's all right, Pete—ain't in a bad place. Now jest tell us who it was that struck you?"

Pete realized then that the porch was crowded and that he was the center of attraction.

"Ol' Miguel," he answered brokenly, his lips twitching. "An'—an' I trusted him, Bill—to the last!"

And then, falteringly he gave up the story, as the riders edged closer and bent over to catch the faint words through the din of rain.

"In my right pocket, Bill," concluded Pete, "the four hundred."

Billings clutched old Pete's good shoulder with iron grip.

"Pete, you're a——"

"Go 'way," quavered Pete wearily, closing his eyes as though the lantern light hurt them. "Bill, I'm quittin' the brush—I'm goin' to the Panhandle!"

From beneath his closed lids the tears were creeping and stealing down his coppery cheeks.

"I tell you I lost somethin' today!" he was muttering. "Go 'way—all o' you! Bill, I'm—I'm gettin' old!"

And then Billings's face lighted with great understanding. He released his grip on the shoulder and placed his hand tenderly upon the white head. He waved back the curious group.

"Sure you're goin' to quit the brush! But you ain't goin' to no Panhandle, Pete! Soon's this flood's over we're comin' back from the hills an' you're goin' to help me boss this outfit—savvy? Now chuck this jabber 'bout losin' faith in human natur' ——!"

"Bill, I—I tell you I'm old—I'm a ol' man!"

Pete's head was wagging stubbornly as he tried to clear his eyes with the back of his hand.

Billings slipped the saddle from under the old head and substituted the hollow of his arm.

"You?" he thundered above the roar of the rain. "You're hell on wheels! Grab a-holt, you fellows an' ease him inside. Ain't that doctor come yet? Easy, now! One o' you cut to town an' tell that widow 'bout her steers!"

But Pete held up a protesting hand. And suddenly the hidden mirth leaped through the pain in his eyes and the corners of his straight mouth puckered queerly.

"You wait! When I get right I'll 'tend —to—that!"

"Jes' list'n!" gruffed Billings as he bore Pete through the door; "turnin' kid at sixty!"

WHALIN'

by WARREN ELLIOTT CARLETON

When the harpoon flies an' the whale cuts loose,
  It ain't like haulin' a codfish in,
But it's more like teasin' a wild bull moose
  When you haven't a handy tree to shin.

A rush—a plunge, an' the waves roll high,
An' he's under an' up, an' thunderin' by
Like the devil himself on a straightaway track,
With fresh harpoons flyin' into his back.
You never can tell which way he'll go;
He may charge the small boats or dive below,
Or put like a flash for the open sea,
Lashin' the waves in his agony.

It ain't no place for nervous men,
  An' timid landsmen ain't no use,
For they'll wish they were on the land again
  When the harpoon flies an' the whale cuts loose!

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The Snakes of Zari

BY

L. Patrick Greene

"TELL ME, nephew, son of my brother, how long hast thou dwelt with me?"

It was Zari the witch-doctor speaking; Zari the most famous, the most feared, and wisest of all the witch-doctors that dwelt in the land of Melefe—chief of the Matabele. Through the whole of the Dark Continent none did more wondrous deed than Zari the witch-doctor, the lord of Life, the servant of Spirits.

He was a smallish man, thin and emaciated, his ribs almost protruding through his skin, which was drawn tightly over them as the parchment on a drum. In a slot in the lobes of his ears were two enormous copper rings; around his neck he wore a necklace of snakes' fangs and human teeth; and around his shoulders a magnificent leopard skin. For Zari was a past master of his art, and wore the full regalia of his order.

The rings telling to all that his ears were ever open—the necklace a proof of his power over life and the spirits. For the snake is the emblem of the soul, and of a truth when the teeth first show, then life really is, and when they have worked their allotted span—how far off is death?

The skin was of a leopard he had killed with his own hands, and was a sign of his power over all animals. Just below his right knee hung several quills containing herbs. This proclaimed his knowledge of the life and death giving medicines.

"How long hast thou dwelt with me?"

Cenambo, his nephew, started as one awaking from a long sleep.

"Pardon, great uncle, I was thinking."

"Oh, oh!" laughed Zari derisively, and his laugh sounded like the harsh croaking of the vultures. "So thou wast thinking? Beware! thy thoughts are not altogether hid from me." Then impatiently—"And yet my question is not answered."

"Twelve years have passed, my uncle, since my mother gave me into thy care. I was then but a boy, a goat-herd; but now——"

He rose to his feet, stretching and flexing his muscles, displaying his wonderful physique. He was well over six feet and marvelously proportioned. His broad shoulders, the barrel-like chest, and mighty arms explained fully why he was called "Indhlovu" by the natives—Indhlovu, the Elephant, the Puller-up-of-trees.

"Yes thou hast improved—that way! Thou art strong but—canst thou do this?"

And he apparently thrust his hand into the flame of the fire and held it there for the space of sixty heart-beats; then he withdrew it, showing it to Cenambo, and lo! It was unscorched, unmarked.

"Nay, my uncle, that I cannot do—yet; though that, and other things thou hast promised I shall do after the great test."

"What I have promised, I have promised. After the test all things shall be told thee. Twelve years thou hast lived with me, sayest thou? What hast thou learned?"

"First that a witch-doctor is the most

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powerful among men, more powerful even than the chief, and that thou, my uncle, art the greatest of all witch-doctors."

"Good! What else?"

"Certain herbs I know that will cure fever and cause sleep."

"That is good of its kind, too. But much is yet to be taught. If a man offend thee what wouldst thou do?"

"I would break him with these hands of mine."

"He! he! What would I do?"

"That I know well. Ye would cut a twig from a tree, and make a charm on it. And lo! as the twig withered, so would the man sicken and then die. That I know for I have seen."

"What more? what more?"

"I know that the souls of our forefathers inhabit the bodies of snakes, and that it is possible, if one know how, to obtain many secrets of the hereafter, of the things to come, from them. Further, during a storm, I can cause the lightning to play around my body so that to all beholders I am as though on fire—but in truth that is but a trick."

"Once again it is good, but not yet canst thou cause the storm to cease, to use it as thy servant. Also take heed who hears when you say, 'It is but a trick.' Now concerning women, my nephew, what of them?"

"I know, my uncle, that the Spirits of the Great made women that men might be born, that they might guard and care for them until they are of an age to fend for themselves. Thou hast told me many times that a woman saps a man's strength of spirit, causing his soul to be disquieted. Therefore because of this witch-doctors are forbidden to marry lest they steal our secrets from us."

"That lesson is well learned, my nephew. Mark well. Every woman is an evil spirit to some man; therefore if ye would be safe treat every woman as thy evil spirit. It is a command. Remember well all these things, and it may well come to pass that when I have gone over, ye shall take my place. Tomorrow is the time for thy testing to begin. Thou must leave this place naked and unarmed.

"For the space of six moons thou must dwell in the bush seeking aid from none. At the end of that time, if thou art yet alive, thou must return to me, thy uncle, bringing with thee the herb that causes the long sleep to fall, and the skin of a leopard which thou hast killed with thy own hands. See to it that the skin shows no mark of the knife or spear. With thy own hands thou must kill it—mark that well.

"Then we two—I, Zari, the witch-doctor, he who stamps with his feet, and lo! the hills shake—and ye, my pupil—we two will go to the kraal of the chief and there shall it be proclaimed before all the people, that Cenambo, is indeed worthy to follow in the footsteps of that Great One, his uncle. After that the great secrets shall be told thee."

"Thy words shall be the road along which I walk, my uncle. But first permit, before I leave for the great test, that I may witness certain of thy wonder-makings. Show me, I pray thee, how it is possible to know whether a snake has imprisoned in it the soul of a dead man, or no."

"Thou art overbold. This is no little thing that ye ask. Yet because thou art my pupil, and also my nephew, I will grant thee thy wish."

SO SAYING he took a handful of powder from a pouch which hung at his waist and threw it on the fire. A bright flame shot up followed by thick clouds of pungent smoke which almost blinded Cenambo. Then taking two pebbles, Zari rubbed one with an ointment which he took from one of the quills hanging at his knee. The smoke of the fire had now died down and Cenambo, rubbing his eyes, saw Zari sitting as he had been, watching him intently.

"Ho!" he chuckled, "thy eyes are yet as the eyes of a babe, or is it that the Fires of Zari are too strong for thee? Perhaps the spirits were in the smoke, bidding thee close thy eyes whilst Zari communed with the Spirits of the Great Great. Now go to thy hut and even as ye enter the door, on thy right hand thou wilt find two baskets.

"Open the first and bring from it the two snakes ye will see there. Nay, be not afraid. They are harmless. But of a truth, if it were to the second basket I sent thee, ye would perhaps live the brief time a man takes to walk two hundred paces—no more."

Cenambo did as he was bid, albeit somewhat hesitatingly, for the Matabele has an inborn dread of snakes. Soon he returned carrying two grass snakes. These he gave to his uncle. Zari played with them for a

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while, allowing them to twine around his arms, his neck; then as he observed the look of horror on Cenambo's face he laughed aloud.

Finally tiring of the play he put one snake into a small bag which he kept at his side, the other he held in his hand. Rising to his feet he held it aloft and chanted:

"Oh, ye Spirits of the Great Great, open your ears and hear. I, Zari, the mouthpiece of the Spirits, crave speech with thee."

He stood for a moment as though listening for an answer. Suddenly his face lighted up and he continued:

"I thank thee, O Great Ones, that thou hast listened to the petition of thy humble servant. Now tell me therefore, I pray thee, whether a soul be imprisoned in this snake."

Slowly he sank to the ground. Then taking the pebble that had not been rubbed with the ointment he held it up for a moment before the snake and said:

"If a soul is imprisoned in thee this is the stone of thy doom. Follow it and perish in the fire of Zari and allow that soul to go free to its own place."

He slowly trundled the pebble into the fire and released the snake. But the reptile made no attempt to leave him, rather sought to entwine itself around his feet. Zari picked it up and handed it to Cenambo saying—

"Take it and kill it, and thou shalt do no evil, for no soul dwelleth therein."

Then taking the other snake from the bag and the pebble which he had rubbed with the ointment he went through the same ceremony. But this time when he released the snake it followed the stone straight into the heart of the fire. There was a sharp hiss. Once again the flames shot up followed by the thick pungent smoke, and it seemed to Cenambo, the shape of a man appeared.

Followed a deep silence, after which Zari spoke:

"That is all. I am weary. Ye have my leave to go."

Full of awed amazement because of the things he had been permitted to witness, Cenambo arose and retired to his hut. All that night Zari communed with the spirits asking that his nephew might with safety come through the test.

Next morning, before the rising of the sun, Cenambo unarmed, naked, and carrying no food, went into the bush. His test had begun.

CENAMBO'S period of probation had nearly expired. For the space of nigh on six moons he had dwelt alone in the bush. Not once had he gone near the villages or sought aid from the natives. He had accomplished all that his uncle had ordered save only one thing. He had not yet killed a leopard—but that fact caused him no anxiety. He had this past seven days been following the spoor of a leopard, noting carefully its habits—its drinking-hole, den, and the time of its hunting forays.

He was even now at the drinking-hole, waiting for the leopard to appear, having resolved that this was to be the night of his supreme test. While he waited his mind dwelt on his experiences during the past six months and his thoughts and hopes for the future. He had lived mostly on herbs and wild fruits; learning from bitter experience, good from evil. Sometimes, when he had been fortunate, he had dined sumptuously on roast buck, which he had caught in a trap cunningly made from the wiry Mapan bush.

The secret of the drug that cures fever, and that other which causes the deep sleep to fall, was his. All had been accomplished, save only the matter of the leopard. He should have been content for soon all things would be made known to him. During his six moons' sojourn alone, except for the spirits of the Great Great, which were always near him, he had come to know the ways of the Spirit he had been taught to worship, very closely.

Yet he was conscious of a conflict going on within him. On the one side were the spirits of tradition that had ordained that he should tread the path of his uncle Zari. These voices spoke of the power that was to be his, a power that could be worked for good or evil. Wealth and honor would be his. When he thought that he too would some day know how to release a man's soul from the body of a snake, the thought thrilled him.

On the other side was his inner consciousness, urging him to forsake the teachings of the witch-doctor, and to be as other men, recalling the happy and contented life of those who dwell in the villages—husbands,

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fathers of children, surrounded by friends; the marriage feast, the feast of Spring, and the greatest of all feasts—the Feast of the Beginning. Strange that to one who had held but brief intercourse with women—indeed had rarely seen one—the voice spoke too of the charm and the wonder of them.

Cenambo found himself thinking and leaning more and more toward the second voice. Never before had he felt so strangely. The warm blood coursed through his veins, and the desire for something—he knew not what—possessed him. In the bush behind him he heard the call of the Inyoni Inyosi, the honey-bird, to its mate.

On the far side of the pool two lions, male and female, came down to drink and having drunk their fill went on their way, shoulder to shoulder, purring as they went. Far away in the distance the heavy bellow of Econtse, the buffalo, answered by the softer note of his mate, broke upon the still air. And then Cenambo knew. It was the mating season and he was lonely.

THE cry of a woman in terror brought him to his feet. There was a rustle in the bushes behind him and a woman darted out. Just behind her crouched a leopard, which true to its kind had played with the woman as a cat with a mouse. It had followed her leisurely, ever keeping within striking distance, and now tiring of the play was making ready to spring.

Even as it leaped Cenambo sprang in front of the woman and took the full shock of the onslaught. Together they went to earth, rolling over and over, the beast snarling and tearing, the man silently grim, ever seeking the one grip he knew would mean victory. Soon he achieved his purpose. With a quick movement he was on top of the leopard, both arms encircling the beast's throat.

Tighter, ever tighter became his grip, and now the leopard sought only to get away from this horrible grip that was slowly choking the life out of it. The end soon came. A few spasmodic struggles and its life ebbed out. Its neck was broken.

Cenambo was exultant. He had at last finished his probation. A leopard he had slain with his own hands. His chest and back were sadly torn, but to his wounds he gave little thought. He could now return to his uncle and have all things made known to him. Yet was this the real reason of his exultation? Was it not because he had, by killing the leopard, saved the life of this woman?

Three days the woman—Mabele, he had learned to call her—tended him and dressed his wounds. From her he learned many things, quite contrary to the things his uncle taught—that a woman was not the thing of evil his uncle had led him to believe, that power was not the only thing in the world. She told him of the wonders of the white people, for Mabele had had some education in a mission school, and as the result of that training had sought and obtained service with the white people.

She was indeed at the time of her rescue from the leopard, returning to her village having completed one term of service with a white family. With her half assimilated knowledge of the white people and their ways, she looked with scorn on the manners and customs of her own people—specially casting ridicule on their religious beliefs—the holy things of tradition.

When she learned from Cenambo that he was the nephew of a witch-doctor and a rich man, she at once evinced a desire to marry him, and to that end strove to win him over to her. And Cenambo was as clay in her hands. All his protests she swept aside.

When he told her of the punishments that lay in store for the disciple of a witch-doctor who was false to the teachings of tradition, she answered him with:

"Fool! Dost not know that the white man will not allow these things to happen? It is against the law."

"But they will take my cattle from me."

"Then will we make complaint to the white men and they will see to it that thy cattle are returned."

And so Cenambo, won over by the desire of heart, heeded the words of Mabele and resolved that he would defy Zari, he would not become a witch-doctor, preferring rather to be the husband of this wonderfully wise woman.

IT WAS in the late afternoon of the sixth day after the killing of the leopard that Cenambo and the woman reached the huts of Zari. They found the chief and all the villagers waiting to greet them.

As they drew nearer and the waiting

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throng could see the skin of the leopard on Cenambo's shoulders, a great shout went up.

"See, where comes Cenambo. Of a truth the branch is even as the trunk."

Zari advanced to meet his pupil.

"Greetings! Nephew! 'Tis well that the leopard was young and unformed else would I now be mourning the death of my brother's son. And the woman with thee —if in truth it be a woman. For my eyes are getting old—and how should a woman be in the company of one, who in the days to come, will be known as the shoot of Zari? There is no doubt my eyes deceive me."

"Nay, uncle, thy eyes are still strong—seeing the things that are. Of a truth this is a woman that is with me. I saved her from the leopard—further I wish to marry her."

"Ingrate! Darest thou stand there and mock me to my face? How can one, who even this day is to be told the wonders, take a wife?"

"My uncle it is even so. Two ways are open before me—the way of a witch-doctor, and the way of the husband. The latter way choose I, for this woman, who is wiser even than art thou, has told me wondrous things that were altogether different to thy teachings. She has told me that the spirit ye worship is no true spirit. Also she has told me how I may become like unto the white men."

Zari sprang forth as though to strike him, but Melefe, the chief, interposed.

"Cenambo, dost thou know the penalty of one who after undergoing the tests and the teachings, turns his back upon them and marries?

"Somewhat I know, Chief."

"Dost know that thou and the woman will be cast out of the tribe, a mark put upon thee both, and thou wilt become wanderers upon the face of the earth—dost know this?"

"Aye, Chief, I know," answered Cenambo falteringly.

"Dost know that the name of thy father and thy father's father will be a thing of shame, and that it will be a sin to utter their names, even in the stillness of the night, because thou hast made a mock of the things that must not be spoken of?"

Then Mabele seeing that Cenambo was relenting asked leave to speak.

"Melefe, and ye people of Melefe, is it a wicked thing that Cenambo does? Look at me—am I ill to look upon? Why do ye follow this shriveled-up monkey whom ye call Zari. The white men have taught me that his magic workings are but tricks."

She would have said more, but to the assembled people, her words were words of blasphemy. Had not Zari cured their sick, brought the rains when their crops had been likely to die for lack of water? What if he had on certain occasions wrought evilly among them, no doubt the evil was merited, and much more evil would be their lot if they listened further to the mad ravings of this woman who aped the dress of the white women, who cast ridicule on the traditions. And with one accord they rushed toward her intending to do her bodily harm. But this was not Zari's way.

"Leave the woman and my nephew to me, ye people of Melefe. Tomorrow at the council-place the choice shall be made."

All night long Zari tried to win Cenambo to him—by threats—by promises, and always he failed. The call of the flesh was stronger than that of the spirits.

Next morning the three repaired to the council-place. There they found the chief and all the people assembled, forming a mighty semi-circle.

"Cenambo," said Melefe, "hast thou chosen?"

"Yea, Chief."

"Thy choice?"

"The woman, great Chief."

"Then must be done the things to thee that custom ordains."

Irons were quickly heated in a fire and the two were branded on the forehead. All their clothing was stripped from them and they stood side by side among the angry jeering throng.

Zari commanded silence.

"I have something to say to this wicked one, and the shameless woman with him."

He drew his bent, shriveled form up to its full height, his eyes blazed. With one hand clenched above his head the other with trembling forefinger pointed at the shrinking Cenambo, he cursed him and the now shrinking Mabele.

"Pig! Defiler of the meat of wisdom which was set before thee! Ye have chosen, and chosen evilly. Thus have ye repaid the long years of teaching, pouring down upon my head the waters of ridicule. So that all men will point the finger of scorn at me, saying, 'He the defier of lightning,

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he who can say 'come' to the winds and lo! the great gale blows, even he is defied by a mere boy, so young that the hair is not yet stiff upon his face.

"Of a truth my snake whispered to me many times, telling me that you were but as a reed that would blow with the tempest. And I in my folly, thinking that your snake would bow to my snake, heeded not the warnings. Little did I think that the tempest would be found in the pools of a woman's eyes. Now listen!

"Ye have insulted me and trod upon my snake, though that is nothing, for it is not dead but liveth and will once more be strong. Ye have trod upon your own snake and the snake of this woman; that also is nothing, for they are now dead, and having died, care not. But—"and here his voice grew hoarse with rage—"ye have trodden upon the snake of your father, my brother, and upon your father's father—for this punishment must follow.

"Ye have grievously insulted—what would ye? 'Tis in my mind to kill thee, but the chief has already pronounced the sentence of banishment upon thee as custom ordains. Thou and this woman must leave this land, and thy cattle will be given to me that the spirits may in somewhat be appeased. But my snake whispers that the snakes of thy father and thy father's father are not so easily appeased. They will see to it that thou gettest thy full reward."

An awed silence fell upon the people, and they looked at Cenambo and the woman as though expecting some fearful punishment to overtake them. And Mabele, despite her overbold assertions that Zari was but a trickster, trembled and was afraid. Then as nothing happened she seized Cenambo's hand and ran out of the village. Harsh words and jeers, accompanied by a volley of stones followed them.

When they had left the village behind them they halted.

"Whither now?" asked Cenambo.

"To the white men. They will see that thy cattle are returned to thee. Further, that dog Zari shall pay for this." And she touched the wound on her forehead.

AFTER the departure of Cenambo and the woman, Zari said to the chief:

"Melefe, my mind misgives me, for the man is my nephew, blood of my blood. Suffer then that sandals be given them, he and the woman, for the way is hard and thorny, and of a truth the punishment is bitter."

He took two pairs of sandals from his pouch and surreptitiously smeared on them the same ointment he had smeared on the pebble which the snake had followed into the fire. Calling one of the natives to him he said:

"Follow my nephew and the woman, and give unto them these sandals. Say that they are a present from the chief. Hasten."

Soon the native was back.

"Cenambo sends thanks oh, Chief and prays that thy path be always smooth."

"Did they put on the sandals?"

"Yea, O Zari."

Zari hastily left the council-place and hastened to his hut, and opened the basket that was just inside the door. In it were two black mombas, the most deadly of all snakes; black and evil looking they were. These he carefully emptied into a large bag. This done he hastened to the place where Cenambo and Mabele had entered the bush after being driven from the village.

Striking their trail Zari followed it quickly until he came to the place where they had been overtaken by the man he had sent after them. After making sure, by closely examining the trail, that they had indeed put on the sandals, he opened the bag and allowed the snakes to emerge.

For a short space they darted here and there, then suddenly, catching the scent of the ointment with which Zari had anointed the sandals, they followed the trail—swift and silent. And Zari, like the spirit of Vengeance, followed.

It was high noon when Zari spied far ahead a dark blotch on the veldt. Later the blotch dissolved into many vultures hopping about their prey. As he drew near, they rose into the air flapping awkwardly, as though gorged with their meal, screaming harshly at the intruder who had disturbed them. A hyena slunk into the bush.

The spirits were fully appeased, and vengeance had been wrought on the backslider. There was very little left of Cenambo or Mabele the woman, and at their feet lay coiled two black mombas.

But Zari grieved, for the man was his nephew, and he loved him.

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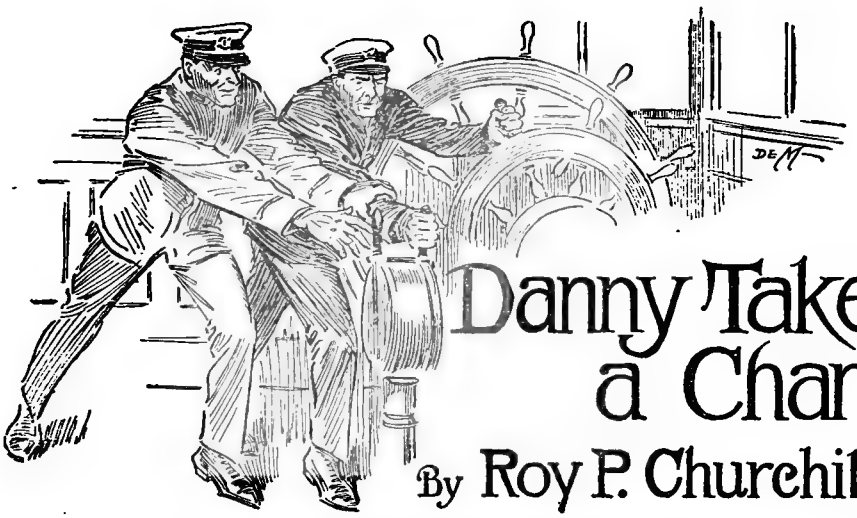

Danny Takes a Chance

By Roy P. Churchill

Author of "The High String," "Salt Water and Gasoline," etc.

THE anxious group of officers which had gathered in the chart-room of the *U. S. S. Dayton* had just gone below. Quartermaster Danny Wallace was at the steering-wheel, and Lieutenant Henry Creel, officer of the deck, stood at his shoulder, checking up querulously any slight deviation of the needle from the given course. The *Dayton* was fighting a head sea of stiff, driving waves, and a wind which sent the spray from the diving bow in a continuous rattle against the heavy glass windows. Outside, the lookouts huddled at their stations, and held their rain-clothes close about them.

The *Dayton* was far off her course, and heading straight out to sea, for only a few miles behind her the breakers pounded on a rocky beach. Black clouds of smoke, sometimes lighted by a dot of fire, trailed backward behind her stacks, and from below came the steady hum of her engines, but the *Dayton* was in danger. Instead of cutting through the gale like the swift little cruiser that she was, she labored and lagged, and gained scant yards against the sweep of the storm shoreward.

The *Dayton* was crippled with foul propellers. Fathoms of new three-inch manila line were wound and twisted around the screws, which choked and throttled them, smothered their power, and called for every pound of steam the boilers could force to make their thrust gain a foot against the sea.

The *Dayton* was homeward bound. Only a few hours earlier on the safe course far offshore, which warships take, she had been speeding for a safe anchorage inside the Capes. The weather was stormy then, but with her bow turned seaward, just enough to offset her leeway from the wind, she took the heavy-beam seas lightly, as a homeward-bound ship with a homeward-bound crew should. Some time during the next day half of the men at least, expected to be putting their names down for liberty.

At nightfall from the passenger track far inshore had come distress rockets, and the wireless man sent a messenger-boy to the captain with an S. O. S. message. The beam sea, breaking shorter and stronger nearer inshore had carried away a passenger steamer's steering-gear, leaving her helpless within a few miles of the beach.

"Call all hands," ordered the captain as he came on deck, and while the *Dayton* ran inshore with the wind and sea helping her speed, the men broke out the steel towing hawser, and made ready for the rescue.

"It's the *Queen* of the Bay City Line," said the captain to the first lieutenant. "She has a hundred passengers besides the crew, and must have been close in when she got into trouble. As it is, we are just close enough to get there in time. Have everything ready, every man detailed to his part of the work. This rescue must go off quickly or we will be too late."

Getting a line aboard was a difficult

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matter. When within a cable's length of the disabled ship, the *Dayton* swung around with her starboard bow to the sea, and with the propellers turning barely enough to keep her from drifting down on the other ship, put a buoyed light line off the port quarter, and let it be carried by the wind within reach of the *Queen*.

So near the shore the seas were breaking dangerously short for the launching of a small boat, and the *Dayton's* captain relied on getting his vessel close enough to make the buoyed line successful. The *Queen* was in the trough of the sea, and rolling so that when the buoy reached her the waves almost threw it upon her decks. Fortunately, at the first attempt, a seaman in the waist secured the line with a grapnel, passed it around the bow, and with the rest of the crew hauled in the light line, then a heavier one, and finally, the *Dayton's* towing hawser.

The *Queen* had offered to use her own towing line, but the *Dayton's* captain knew too much of the uncertain gear furnished merchant ships, and preferred to use his own.

For three hours the *Dayton* towed the crippled ship away from the danger, protesting every foot of the way with a stubborn sea, and finally the merchant vessel signaled that the damage to her steering-gear had been repaired, and asked to be allowed to proceed.

The two ships were still close inshore, but the Navy's attitude toward the merchant service carries two strict rules—to render aid when asked, and to let go when the job is finished—so immediately the *Dayton's* captain had his crew stand by to take the towing line aboard, and signaled the other ship to cast off when ready.

The boatswain was aft with the deck force, and the first lieutenant was on the bridge with a megaphone. It was very dark, and still blowing a gale. Men and officers were anxious to get the line aboard and once more feel the beat of the screws taking them out of danger.

The heavy steel towing line was hauled in swiftly through the chocks, and faked down along the decks until the end of the three-inch manila line came aboard. The boatswain was painstaking and thorough. He stopped to unbend the lighter line from the hawser, singing out as he did so—

"All aboard the towing line, sir."

In the wind the officer of the deck, standing in the waist of the ship a little forward of where the men worked, so that his voice would reach to the first lieutenant on the bridge, heard the words, "All aboard" as, "All clear," repeated them so to the first lieutenant, who hurried into the chart-room, threw the engine-room telegraph to half speed ahead, and a moment later to full speed ahead, and was giving the man at the wheel his course, when the officer of the deck burst in upon him.

"Stop the propeller," he shouted. "There's been a mistake! The three-inch manila is still trailing."

Before the first lieutenant could act, the damage was done, and the whirling screws had caught up the tough new line together with its long length of buoyed light line, and spun it in cluttering tangles around the propellers. The *Dayton* tried backing, tried going ahead slowly, tried full speed, and all she could get against the gathering storm was barely enough to keep her headed into the waves, and when they ran in a smaller succession than usual, to gain a few yards before the next onslaught.

Yet the *Dayton* did manage to hold on. The propellers turned no more slowly at least, and so after hours of nervous strain, the first lieutenant, captain and navigating officer had gone below, leaving Quartermaster Danny Wallace and Lieutenant Henry Creel in the chart-room.

"MIND your helm," spoke the lieutenant imperiously. "You let her go off too far without bringing her back. Where did you quartermasters learn to steer, anyhow? Any apprentice-boy on the ship could do as well."

Danny made no reply. The *Dayton* was bucking and swinging like a wild horse, and he was doing his best, the best that years of experience, sober thinking and cool judgment could give to the task in hand.

Just then a wave a little larger than the rest struck the ship's bow, and swung her off a couple of points. Lieutenant Creel pounced on him savagely.

"On your course!" he cried. "Are you standing this watch, or asleep in your hammock?"

"Aye, aye, sir," answered Danny Wallace to the first order, and steadied the swing of the bow with the wheel, at the same time glancing at the clock on the bulkhead. In little more than an hour the watch would be over. Both he and Creel

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would be relieved, and in his displeasure he had the satisfaction of knowing that none of the younger quartermasters would have to stand the watch with Creel.

The old quartermaster's long experience in the Navy had made him shipmates with few men like Lieutenant Creel. Skilled in cataloging men according to their types, he had put this one down as hopelessly bad, and in the watches that he stood with him, gave him a detached, impersonal obedience, flawless in its technic, and yet as soulless in man-to-man relationship as if he had been an automaton.

Creel resented this. Other enlisted men cringed before him, were provoked to disobedience, or grew irritable and prone to mistakes, all of which he could find fault with and punish, while the old quartermaster baffled every effort to trap him.

The mean soul of Henry Creel showed in his face, which was long and narrow, with a deep-cut straight mouth and an overhanging nose, high bony cheeks, and small heavy-lidded eyes set close together. Cruelty was stamped on every feature.

One of the things that Danny Wallace remembered against him was the time he had hauled a man from his warm hammock and made him stand a lookout watch in his underclothes, when the weather was freezing, because Creel had bumped his head against the hammock as he came forward. At another time a little newsboy waif from shore had seen his precious papers thrown overboard while Creel laughed. His brother officers in the ward-room barely tolerated Creel, and the men hated him.

"The happiest day of my life will be when that snake bites himself and dies," said Jimmy Wade, the gunner's mate. "I'd give a month's pay to put a wreath of lemons on his grave." This being the time that Creel had made one of Jimmy's gun-crew, during target practise, pick up a hot cartridge case with his bare hands.

Tired of the futile baiting of Danny Wallace, Creel went outside the chart-room to the bridge and made the lookouts stand at attention, facing the sheets of blinding spray, instead of huddling a little more comfortably in their rainclothes. When he returned he growled once more at Danny Wallace and set up a grim pacing across the narrow room behind the helmsman.

In the hour that followed, the *Dayton's* screws, turning stubbornly against the impeding rope, cut and shredded some of it to pieces, and very gradually she began to make headway against the sea. The captain, unable to sleep while his ship was in serious danger, made another trip to the bridge. He came alone. Creel was outside when he came up the ladder and made his report that the ship was clearing her propeller and making better speed, while the captain and he were outside the chart-room. The only part of the conversation that Danny Wallace heard was when the captain stood in the doorway for a moment just before he started below again.

"You say she has made five miles the last hour?"

"Yes, sir," answered Creel, "an increase of two miles over the preceding."

"Call me if she falls back any," instructed the captain, and was gone.

Quartermaster Danny Wallace had not needed the few mords which he overheard to know that the *Dayton* was doing better, and Creel had not thought it necessary to mention that the ship was gaining, for he had the wheel and could feel the ship forge ahead. He knew the lights on shore and could estimate their bearing. Also he knew because Lieutenant Creel was in better humor. During the delay the lieutenant had been half wild.

He of all the ship was most anxious to make port. A certain speculation in copper needed his personal direction, and he had promised his brokers to be on hand at ten the next day. With the *Dayton* steadily gathering speed he would get on shore a few hours late perhaps, yet before the close of business on the day promised. Half a dozen times during the watch he had asked over the engine-room telephone if more speed were possible. He was impatient of any further delay and cautioned Danny Wallace continually about keeping on the course.

Then out of the night from somewhere aft came the shrill warning cry of "Man overboard!" The cry of men who are sure of the vital import of their words, rising above the noise of the storm and the throb of the engines, from lip to lip like a quick-burning fuse around the decks, "Man overboard!"

The quartermaster's fingers tightened on the wheel-spokes as he waited for the order to swing the head of the ship to make a lee for the launching of the lifeboat. No order came, and as the tense seconds passed, a messenger-boy flung open the chart-room

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door, and stood inside with the water dripping from his wet rainclothes into little pools on the deck.

"Man overboard, sir," he reported to the officer of the deck, his eyes bright with excitement under his dripping sou'wester, and in a moment was gone again, banging the door behind him, and the two men in the chart-room heard him splash across the bridge and down the ladder to the deck with flying leaps. The boy was young, and full of the thrill of danger. He hoped to find a vacant place in the lifeboat.

Still no order came from Henry Creel, and Danny Wallace turned his eyes from the compass and looked at him.

"Watch your course, Quartermaster," ordered the lieutenant. "Suppose some fool is overboard. The ship is worth more than one man. With the choked propellers the time we would lose might put us on the rocks."

"But a man is overboard, sir," answered Danny Wallace, as if the simple statement were enough. "The ship is no longer in serious danger."

"Not another word from you, Quartermaster. You are on the report for insolence. I'll teach you to try and tell an officer his business."

He smiled cruelly. Here was the long-waited-for chance to punish Danny Wallace.

"Let the man sink," he concluded contemptuously.

Creel's plan was to wait as long as he could without taking notice of the man overboard, then send a messenger to the first lieutenant and ask him for advice as to stopping the ship while there was still some of the rope 'round the propellers. By the time the final word reached him, or the first lieutenant was wakened, and came on deck, it would be too late to stop the ship. Even the blazing life-buoy would have burned out or been lost in the storm.

DANNY WALLACE fought his battle swiftly. If something was to be done it must be done at once. There wasn't time to appeal to higher authority over the head of the lieutenant. All his long years of faithful service, his assured place, his liberty and his rate were at stake. On the other hand a man was overboard, some shipmate weighted in oilskins was fighting desperately to keep afloat until the lifeboat came. A life was at stake, and counted in seconds. Danny Wallace balanced accounts, whipped his soul clean and made the sacrifice.

Without a word to Creel he acted. Swinging the wheel to starboard he held it with one hand, and with the other jerked the engine-room telegraph to "Stop!" Then before the astonished Creel could reach him he had signaled "Reverse," and held the lever in place with his right arm.

"Let go!" ordered Creel, but the quartermaster held on, his sinewy fingers locked tight on the handle.

Creel caught hold of the hand and tried to pull it free, but Danny Wallace's right arm was like a bar of steel, and Creel's efforts were useless.

"I'll show you," bellowed Creel, beside himself with rage, and turned to pick up a heavy stool behind him.

Instantly the quartermaster shoved the lever to "Stop," dodged aside as Creel slipped on the wet deck, flung a table in the enraged officer's way, opened the chart-room door, ran out on the bridge and down the ladder to the deck.

Before the wind and sea the *Dayton* had swung off almost immediately, and the reversed engines, with the little speed she was making, had brought her almost immediately to a stop. By the time Danny Wallace reached the lee quarter, the lifeboat was half-way to the water, and he swarmed down the after falls in time to unhook the block and ship the steering oar.

"You take her, Danny," said Hickman, the coxswain. "I'll take the stroke oar. We're a man over, but he can bail."

Under the *Dayton's* quarter there was a good lee for launching the lifeboat, for as yet she had not fallen off entirely into the trough of the sea, and without mishap the boat shoved clear and headed toward the blazing life-buoy.

"It's a long way off," said Hickman. "What made us so long in stopping anyway? If the guy that's overboard reaches her, he'll think we're never coming."

Danny did not answer. The few minutes preceding had been busy ones, and he needed time to get his breath, and all his skill and strength to guide the plunging whaleboat across the storm waves.

"Put another man to bailin'," he advised a little later, as a wave threw its tip into the boat, "and you men take it easy. The hard pull is comin' when we start back headin' into 'em."

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With the wind and sea driving, the boat made a quick trip to the buoy, and running alongside found no one supported by it.

"False alarm," said the coxswain, "or else the poor devil was a poor swimmer. It'd be rough out here for the best of 'em. I move that we get back to the ship. She's mighty close to shore water yet."

"Shout again," urged Danny Wallace. "The man that went overboard will forgive us for waitin' another minute or two."

No sound answered the coxswain's hail.

"No use," said the coxswain.

"Try a chorus," said Danny. "Now, all together," and this time while they waited the *Dayton's* whistle came sharply down the wind, recalling the boat.

Still Danny Wallace hesitated. The boat was in danger and the ship could not delay too long, but a man was overboard, and the old man could not give up yet.

"Give way all together," he ordered finally, with reluctance, and then changed the order quickly to "Stern all!" for a faint cry which both he and the coxswain heard came out of the night from somewhere to leeward.

The wind had been carrying the boat faster than the floating swimmer, and the extra time given had barely carried her into sound of his voice, to which perhaps the ship's recall whistle had added strength. The boat's crew shouted a reply, and the answer came a little nearer, and just as the *Dayton* repeated her recall signal, they hauled the dripping figure of the almost spent man aboard, laid him in the bottom of the boat, and threw a tarpaulin over him.

"Give way heartily, boys," said Danny Wallace. "The ship's been driftin' faster than we have and it's a short pull."

To make a better lee for hoisting the whaleboat, the *Dayton* started her engines, and once more swung slowly 'round with her bow to the seas. Before she could fall off again Danny Wallace was guiding the small boat under the quarter, and under the skilful management of the first lieutenant, who had relieved the deck officer, the boat was hoisted safely and the half-drowned man hurried to the sick bay.

While the boat was still away Lieutenant Creel had been relieved and had gone below in a rage. He had certain calculations to make regarding his inability to get ashore on time and must get permission again to use the wireless for a private message. His complaint against Danny Wallace could wait until morning, while the fact that a man was overboard and a boat's crew in danger, did not concern him.

BEFORE drill next morning, Lieutenant Creel asked permission to see the captain, and without delay was granted an interview. All night long the *Dayton* had fought slowly and steadily away from the rocky beach and the strands of rope which held her propellers had been worn away, until now in a few hours, she hoped to be safe in port, where the propellers could be freed entirely.

The captain received his visitor seated at his desk.

"I have a complaint to make," said Creel, "of such serious nature that I felt I must speak to you of it before it goes through the regular channels."

He spoke coldly, sure of himself, and of the punishment that he meant to demand for Daniel Wallace, Quartermaster.

The captain's face was impassive. He tapped gently with a pencil on the desk before him, and nodded very slightly to the other to proceed.

"While on watch last night with Daniel Wallace, Quartermaster, we lost a man overboard. With the ship in danger, I debated the wisdom of stopping, and risking the lives of a boat's crew, when we needed so sorely every bit of the sea room we had gained. I had decided to ask advice of the first lieutenant, when this quartermaster, whose years in the Service evidently give him a false impression of his importance, abandoned the wheel, stopped the ship, and forcibly prevented me from reaching the engine-room telegraph. In so doing, he endangered the safety of the ship and her crew."

"What became of the quartermaster?"

Creel shrugged his shoulders.

"He ran from the chart-room, and as I was relieved from the deck a few minutes later, I went below and did not make complaint until this morning."

"Then you do not know whether the man overboard was saved or not?"

"I suppose he was," said Creel lightly. "The boat was launched, and got away safely before I went below. But it is only pure luck that the time we lost did not turn out disastrously for the ship."

"Your idea then," spoke the captain, switching away from Creel's line of argument, "would have been to proceed at full

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speed when the cry, 'Man overboard' came, until you had notified the first lieutenant, summoned him into conference, and decided whether or not the ship could risk stopping and lowering a boat?" Creel nodded.

"But, my dear sir," protested the captain, "by that time there would have been no need. The man overboard would have long since been drowned. Also you knew at the time that the ship was steadily clearing herself, and was not in serious danger from a small delay."

"True enough, sir," defended Creel, "but you know how those things sometimes turn out. The delay might have been serious if any accident had befallen the boat's crew."

"The Navy believes in taking a chance to save life," said the captain. "Consider the case of Quartermaster Danny Wallace. He has a splendid record, is a man respected and honored in the Service, and to save a life he was willing to take a chance, and if necessary give it all up."

Lieutenant Creel brought the subject abruptly back to his personal viewpoint.

"This man disobeyed orders and neglected his duty," he said. "I wish to make those charges against him."

The captain was silent.

"I feel, sir, that nothing less than a general court-martial will justify the insult he has offered to an officer and to the Service."

The captain rose from his chair, pushed it backward and faced Lieutenant Creel.

"I have had an interview with Wallace and with the regular coxswain of the lifeboat," he said. "It seems that the man overboard would have been lost except for Wallace. He acted as coxswain of the lifeboat. Out there in that little cockleshell he stayed on and on, while two men bailed to keep her from sinking, and the ship whistled the recall, until at the last moment he found his man and brought him in.

"In making your complaint, of course, you could not know this, Mr. Creel, because as you said, you had gone below and turned in. This incident should make you a little easier on Danny Wallace, for without doubt, the man would have drowned, if he had done as you wished, or if he had given up easily and come aboard when the boat's mission seemed hopeless."

"Sentiment has nothing to do with it, sir," said Creel. "This man Wallace flouted me, disobeyed me, came only short of personal violence." The captain smiled.

"I was afraid it would be this way," he said. "And you may have your punishment, but I felt that you should know all the facts, have a chance to drop the matter if you wished. If you are determined on your course, I have the papers all made out. All you need to do is to sign here," and stepping back from the desk he indicated a blank line in a printed form.

Creel glanced over the words, and his sneer of satisfaction turned to a scowl of anger, as he straightened up.

"What joke is this, sir," he said. "I'll never sign a thing like that. It is a recommendation for a bravery medal and a reward."

"Just so," said the captain, "and you will sign, please." Into his voice had crept that hard, unyielding note which in times of stress made him truly a captain. "Otherwise, I have here also a complaint by me, which turns the circumstances you relate into a slightly different angle. With my signature, I think I can be reasonably sure that it means your retirement to civil life. On the other hand, if you sign this and give this brave man what he so justly deserves, all I will ask from you is that you be transferred from this ship."

"But why?" stormed Creel. "*Why?*" as he held out his hand for the pen.

"Just this," said the captain. "I happen to know why you were so anxious for the ship to make port. You, sir, were willing that a man lose his life, in order that you might gain personally. This ship was in slight danger but you used that fact as an excuse to gain a purely selfish monetary advantage. Only for one fact, I would have you discharged from the Service. I like this man, Danny Wallace. He's a man clean through, and no officer in any ship that I ever command will have a chance to use a technical breach of the rules to break such a man as he is."

"I do not believe in sentiment," repeated Lieutenant Creel a little more humbly.

"Neither do I," said the captain, "and it is lucky for you that I do not. I would do what I am doing for any coal-passer or ordinary seaman on the ship, and the one thing that saves you from dismissal is the fact that I was the man overboard. Let it be a lesson to you."

And the captain watched silently while Creel signed, saluted, and went out the door.

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A LETTER from one of us at the front, one whose stories we've read in our magazine:

On a hill in France,
September 11, 1917.

Here I am in France, a land made up of color, odd characters and plot material. But, unfortunately, I have practically no time for fiction as my work requires almost every minute of the day. It is impossible to write here at night.

I LIKE this new life or experience. It is filled with the spirit of adventure. I live from day to day, wondering what is going to happen next. I can hardly realize that I am the same person who, a few weeks back, was turning out South Sea Island stories for *Adventure*. Indeed, I feel, at times, that Charles Brown, Jr., the ambulancier, is an entirely different individual from Charles Brown, Jr., the short-story writer.

Because of the strict censorship on all mail, I do not know what kind of letters I'll be able to get through to you for the readers of the Camp-Fire. However, I shall try to write you some descriptive stuff, the kind of material that does not contain information of military value.—CHARLES BROWN, JR.

I'VE learned more about the American Indians from Hugh Pendexter's stories and his Camp-Fire chats about them than I've learned from any other one source. That isn't saying so very much, but that's not Mr. Pendexter's fault. Here, for example, is some interesting "dope" bearing on his story in this issue:

The story is based on the tutelarism of the American Indian. J. W. Powell in his first annual report on the work of the Bureau of American Ethnology in part says (page 41), "Among all the tribes of North America with which we are acquainted tutelarism prevails. Every tribe and every clan has its own protecting god, and every individual has his *my god*. It is a curious fact that every Indian seeks to conceal the knowledge of his *my god* from all persons, for he fears that, if his enemy should know of his tutelar deity, he might by extraordinary magic succeed in estranging him and be able to compass his destruction through his own god."

McLean's experience is perfectly plausible. James Moony, of the B. A. E., in his article on scalping, page 482, part 2, Bulletin Thirty, in part says: "The operation of scalping was painful but by no means fatal. The impression that it was fatal probably arises from the fact that the scalp was usually taken from the head of a slain enemy as a token of his death, but among the Plains tribes the attacking party frequently strove to overpower his enemy and scalp him alive, to inflict greater agony before killing him, and frequently also a captured enemy was scalped alive and released to go back thus mutilated to his people as a direct defiance, etc."

Howol page ii, interjection in Teton dialect. Translated *Come!* or *Now!* Dakota language embraces four major dialects—Santee, Yankton, Teton and Assiniboin. First two spoken by eastern Dakota bands, the last by those in northwest and Teton by western. The Oglala are the principal division of the Teton Sioux.

In the nineteenth annual report of B. A. E., page 431: "The Indian has always four as the principal sacred number, with usually another only slightly subordinated."

Mahopa, magic-power, is equivalent to the Iroquoian *orenda*. A warrior possessing a strong personal deity and at the same time blessed with a strong *mahopa* was well nigh invincible. There is any amount of similar dope along these lines and if I've skipped anything you'd like to know about please call on me. I always feel a bit embarrassed in inflicting data of this nature, and have a fear of overdoing it.—HUGH PENDEXTER.

OUR "Lost Trails" is considered by many one of the most interesting things in the magazine. I rather think so myself. But, after all, its interest is a minor point. For consider the work it has done, the big changes it has made in many people's lives. Some of the inquiries, of course, are merely those of friends who've become separated and wish to find each other again. Even that is a thing of importance. But consider the grieving, anxious mother who has lost her son, the wives, husbands, brothers, fathers, daughters who have been lost or have lost a loved one. And our "Lost Trails" has found them.

IT FINDS one out of every five, and that is really an amazing accomplishment. It isn't just the United States and Canada that must be searched, but the whole wide, wide world clear into its most

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remote corners. And many of the cases are those that police, detectives, newspapers, private search and all the other means of finding the lost have already tried and failed to find even a trace.

Many are the heartfelt letters of gratitude that come in to us, giving us an insight into just how real, how varied and how great to those concerned are the human dramas always being acted out somewhere behind those small printed words on one page of our magazine. Maybe you'd like to read one of them, one out of many. The names of the people are, of course, taken out, for naturally it is a matter private and personal to them and not to be spread broadcast:

Lost Trails has again been the means by which mother and son have come together after months of separation. What a happy reunion, only those that have had the experience can understand. The Prodigal Son did not receive a better welcome than I. So it is with the greatest of pleasure that I thank you for your part in the reunion of two loved ones.

Your magazine has filled many a dark hour when at sea or on land, not only in the States, but out of them, for I have been somewhat of an adventurer myself.

I would like the pleasure of taking you by the hand and saying face to face what I can only say on paper. But nevertheless you have mother's and my own heartfelt hopes for the success of your magazine.

We ask the privilege of being called

Your friends, —— —— and —— ——.

FOLLOWING our Camp-Fire custom, L. Patrick Green, giving us in this issue his first story in *Adventure*, stands up and gives us an account of himself.

Boston, Massachusetts.

It's a dangerous thing to ask a modest man for his life history—something like holding a red flag before a mad bull. He hesitates a moment, pawing the ground, then rushes and there is no stopping him. Well, here goes.

I WAS born in a small English village in March, 1891, and a few weeks later was christened Louis Montague Greene. In after years the Louis Montague part was too much for me and so I changed it to Lewis Patrick. Do you blame me?

Went to a large boarding-school until I was eighteen, and then came the parting of the ways. My people wished me to study for the ministry, and I wanted to be an engineer. A compromise was effected, in which, be it said, my people had no voice. I had always loved to read stories of Africa, stories of the pioneers—Rhodes, Fletcher, Jameson and the rest of the Empire builders. Consequently, when, at this time, I read in a newspaper that men were wanted for the Rhodesian Civil Service, I jumped at the opening. Passing the examination, I was accepted, although three years under the age limit. So I was on the way to the land of my dreams shortly after my eighteenth birthday.

I WAS in the country almost four years and surely had my full share of "interesting experiences." I have been lost for two whole days—days that seemed like years—in the bush; that was my worst experience. Lions? Yes, I had adventures with them. On one occasion I had made my camp on the banks of the Shangani; it was in the lion country and so we made what is known as a scherm, a fence made of thorn-bush. The enclosure was made large enough to accommodate myself, the four native police and my own servant—also the animals. It was in the dry season and the river was quite dry, except for pools here and there. It was near such a pool that we made camp.

It was nearly an hour to sundown, and so I crossed over the river in search of game for the evening meal. I soon sighted and shot one of the smallest species of buck, a duiker. Not wishing to disturb the boys, who were busy building the scherm, I undertook to bring it back to camp myself. As it was quite heavy I dragged it most of the way, leaving quite a trail. Some of the buck we had for supper and the rest was hung up in a tree that formed one-quarter of the scherm.

IT WAS after sundown and all was pitch dark. The boys were seated around the fire, singing about the day's march. I was seated on my blankets, having a last pipe before turning in. Suddenly afar off we heard a low rumble, like distant thunder, followed by two harsh coughs. It was the indescribable, unmistakable roar of a lion on the hunting trail. The note of a lion on a hunt is petrifying—hypnotic in its influence. I know that my spine felt icy cold.

It had its effect, too, on the boys, for they huddled closely together. One, however, an old fellow, took a powder out of his pouch and strewed it round the outside of the scherm, muttering charms the while. This, he said, would prevent the lion from harming us.

MEANWHILE the moans—that is a truer descriptive word than roars—were coming nearer, ever nearer. Soon we could hear him down in the river-bed—the *swish, swish* as he went through the reeds, and the heavy crunch of big paws on the sand. Then came silence, and I, in the wisdom of twenty years, said "He is gone." I went to bed, but I did not undress and took care to keep my rifle close.

Next morning, awaking at sun-up, I noticed that the boys were not in the scherm, and hearing heated conversation outside, I went out to them. They were pointing to the ground and jabbering in an excited fashion. A heavy dew had fallen during the night, and there, plain as the nose on your face, was the spoor of a lion. We could trace it from the river-bed, following the trail I had made when bringing back the buck. We could see where he had come right up to the tree in which the buck was hanging, and had indeed stood on his hind legs, with his front paws on the trunk of the tree. In that position he could have looked over the scherm, and there was I sleeping just underneath him. He didn't touch the buck—and I am telling the story.

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ELEPHANTS, giraffe, zebra, and, most dangerous of all the big game, the African buffalo, hippopotami, and the rest, I have seen them all, hunted most, and shot some.

Dealing almost entirely with natives, I learned to speak their language and came to admire them. They taught me many things that were good for a youngster to know. And always I kept in good condition. So when I was stationed at Bulawayo, one of the few towns in Rhodesia, I was selected to play on the team respresenting Rhodesia in the Currie Cup Football Tournament. Going south, we played all the other provinces—Natal, Cape Colony and the rest. When in Durban I did a little sprinting, training with Bobby Walker, who was at that time the one-hundred-yards amateur champion of the world.

MY CAREER was cut short by a sunstroke. I was riding a horse at the time, and fell with my back across a large rock. This happened about one hundred miles from the nearest railroad. I shall never forget the agony of the trip to the station, carried by natives on a poorly constructed stretcher. After six months in hospital I was sent back to England and finally given my walking papers—medically unfit.

England struck me as being too conservative and *small* so I decided to come out to the States (this was in the Fall of 1913), intending to go West, but Fate ruled otherwise. I have been a timekeeper for a New York construction company, life insurance agent, sold stock for a "shady" broker—though I did not know it at the time. Canvassed and spoke at open-air meetings under the auspices of the Massachusetts Woman's Suffrage Association, and for the last two years have been with a society for the care of children, in Boston, having charge of the older boys who are placed in homes throughout Massachusetts.

I am married. My wife *was* an American. (It's hardly fair that a woman should so lose her nationality.) My baby girl *is* an American, and I *will* be an American as soon as I can get out my second papers. —L. PATRICK GREENE.

WE WANT our readers to write to us whenever they have any criticisms to make on anything connected with the magazine. Naturally our object is to make *Adventure* suit them as much as possible. Even telling us which stories you like or don't like helps a great deal in choosing stories and authors for future numbers. But it helps still more when you tell us *why* you like or don't like them.

Also it helps when you point out the mistakes and discrepancies that occasionally appear in our stories, as they do in all magazines. No one of us here in the office thinks he knows everything about everything; if he did, he'd soon get over it in the face of the thousands of subjects *Adventure's* stories bring up. And when it comes to the very large number of subjects, each one of which at least some of you know more about than we do, why, we want your help and are grateful for it. If mistakes are pointed out we're less likely to make them over again.

AND I want to say right here that in the past practically all of you have called attention to mistakes in a way that was purely friendly. We appreciate that. Once in a while some fellow finds a slip, goes up into the air with a loud noise and cusses us out because the author made it and we didn't catch it, giving us to understand that he and we are therefore pretty nearly imbecile all around. It may have been a very unimportant slip, he forgets that while he may know more than the author and editors about this one subject they may possibly know more about a few other subjects than he does, and quite often he finds that he'd gone off half-cocked anyway and has to backwater. However, it's our general rule to pass any criticism of any value on to the author in question, and our writers have shown that they take criticism in the same spirit that we do. Also, thanks chiefly to our writers rather than to us editors, there have been amazingly few mistakes in our stories considering the great number of subjects and the various fields covered.

HERE'S a case, showing how easy it is to make a slip. Most of our readers didn't notice this slip at all, but there are always a few of you who have intimate knowledge of almost any subject that comes up. I've been in Cornwall, but I hadn't the faintest idea whether they use dories there or not, except that I'd always associated the dory chiefly with our own New England coast. As to where the Cornish gas-buoys might be placed, not an idea.

It's my fault about the dories. As Captain Dingle first wrote the story he gave it no definite geographic setting, but, at my suggestion, he gave one to it and in revising accordingly he missed the dories, which were, of course, entirely in place in the original version.

Captain Dingle in "The Avenging Sea" is trying to show that some of the people of Cornwall earn their living by wrecking. Such a story is false and brings discredit on the people of Cornwall.

THERE never was a gas-beacon or buoy on the northwestern part of Cornwall. There is a gas-buoy off the "Manacles Rocks," about twelve miles east of the Lizard Point. Ships coming from the

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south would open the "Wolf Rock Light" north, northwest of the Land's End about twenty-two miles, and if bound for Bristol would bear away for Hartland Point on the Devonshire coast. If coming from the Lizard they would (if sober) keep an offing until they opened the Longships which light is visible about fifteen miles. The next would be Godvery Light (with a light about the same radius), then Hartland Point (all these lights are visible one from another). Leaving Hartland, the course is altered for Portshead, for Bristol is on the River Severn. In case of fog all the lighthouses are fitted with automatic foghorns. The Longships and the Wolf Rock Lights were built about sixty years ago and at that time there weren't many steamers.

Now another thing, if Captain Dingle is going to have wreckers on the coast of Cornwall he shouldn't use dories, for the people there wouldn't know one without they were introduced to it. I hope you can see your way to publish this so people will know that the Cornish people are civilized and have been since the Phenicians bought tin there for Solomon's Temple.—JESSE D'ROUFFIGNAC, a native of Mounts Bay, Cornwall.

When I sent the above to Captain Dingle he replied as follows:

First conceding the point he undoubtedly makes, I acknowledge my error in using a dory. That was an oversight for which I humbly apologize to all Cornishmen.

As for the absence of gas-beacons—where such aids to navigation are known to exist at all it is surely a part of an author's license to place such a one (for the purposes of his story) in any other unnamed locality in order that he may not tread too harshly on the corns of those who live near, or know, the locality of an existing beacon.

MY OWN native place, Devon, is near enough to Cornwall to have given me a fair knowledge of, and a deep admiration for, the men of Cornwall. It also gives me the knowledge that wreckers were not always strangers to the famous duchy. What Cornishman or Devon man has not heard the story of the wreck near St. Anthony? This, happening just before churchtime on a Sunday, the clerk announced that "The Measter would gee them a hulladay, etc.," for purposes well understood by the pastor. Then, as the congregation prepared to rush pell-mell for the scene of the wreck, not on humanity bent, the pastor is reputed to have shouted: "Here! Here! Let's all start fair!"

Whether this particular tale is true or not, such stories do not gather around any community without some reason; and there are many such, and some of darker import.

AS FOR Cornish civilization, that is not disputed. But surely Mr. D'Rouffignac will admit that there never was yet a community so utterly civilized that it did not breed SOME brutal natures, some thieves, even an occasional murderer. Loyalty to one's native place may blind one to its faults; it doesn't render them non-existent. Many millions of people—good people—have until quite recently regarded Germany as highly civilized!—A. E. DINGLE.

I think perhaps Mr. D'Rouffignac has forgotten that fiction can not be judged at all points by the standards of fact articles. Even fiction mustn't make a people use a type of boat they don't use in real life, but in the matter of buoys the author was rather justified. And I fear his commendable patriotism has run away with him a bit in his last sentence. Cornwall has for centuries been "civilized," more than some countries, less than others; the Cornish, Welsh and Bretons, like the other main division of the Celtic race, have contributed much to the world. But if he means us to infer that Cornwall has been so civilized that there has been no wrecking by its people since the time of the Phenicians, he is asking too much. As a matter of plain fact, Cornwall stands out as a place where that pleasant little pastime was formerly particularly in vogue. The date of the story is not set, but its general tone makes it antedate the present day. "Civilized," too, is only a relative term, and I'm sure he'll admit, for example, that the civilization of the Phenicians was several eras ahead of that of Cornwall in their day.

FOLLOWING a Camp-Fire custom of years' standing, one of our number who has hitherto been a member of the readers' brigade and now joins the writers' brigade as well, stands up to give an account of himself. Men, shake hands with William Harper Dean. Mr. Dean, the Camp-Fire welcomes you among its writers and listens.

I'm afraid my autobiography will be just a bit disappointing to readers of *Adventure*, for until the last three or four years I have followed the non-adventurous career of entomologist, working my way by successive stages through the South and Southwest, in Government and State employ. And yet a field entomologist does find opportunity to assimilate fiction material if he is so inclined. To my mind the Texas drought and "norther," the Louisiana lagoon and bayou, and the unique life of the Mississippi riverman are all of them full of romance, ofttimes adventure.

About four years ago I set myself seriously to the task of writing, taking the job of Washington correspondent for *The Country Gentleman*, with free-lance privileges. I'm still at it and hope to be for the rest of my life.—WM. HARPER DEAN.

FROM the following do not get the wrong impression that E. E. Harriman does not hold in high respect all those of German blood who are loyal to America. It is the other kind he has in mind, those

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who pretended to be Americans, who, many of them, gave their formal oath to be Americans, but when the test came lined up against America and for her enemies. When his country goes to war Mr. Harriman is not friendly to her enemies, at home or abroad, and in either peace or war he hates a liar, a perjurer, a sneak, a hypocrite and a traitor. So do I.

Camp-Fire Comrades: If there is any doubt left in any of your minds as to the Germanic idea in America, read this.

"We have suffered long the preachment that 'you Germans must allow yourselves to be assimilated; you must merge with the American people,' but no one will ever find us prepared to descend to an inferior level. No! We have made it our aim to elevate the others to our level. We will not allow our two-thousand-year culture to be trodden down in this land. Many are giving our German culture to this land of their children, but that is possible only if we stand together. . . . Let us stand up for our good right and hold together. Be strong! Be GERMAN!"

These are the words of an official of a national German society in this country, spoken before ten thousand German-Americans in Milwaukee. Get it, boys? Don't be German-Americans or Americans, but BE GERMAN! And on top of that the liars say they are loyal to this country!

Add to this the words of another "American" of the same kind in Chicago:

"When the thousands and hundreds of thousands of those drafted for military service realize that their country is going to make them victims of a foreign adventure, there will arise a conflict between sentiment and duty which may threaten the internal peace of the republic. . . . We prefer to sacrifice ourselves rather than see the old Fatherland, after its glorious battles, done out of the reward of its victory."

Glorious sentiments for loyal Americans as they call themselves! If Germanic peoples do not intend to assimilate, why should they be permitted to take out naturalization papers? If they propose to be German forever, let them stay in Germany. I begin to think as a boy with whom I went to school said he thought. His parents were German. "They all think they are smarter than any one else and they are as dumb as the oxen. Just when they think they are smartest they are the biggest fools of all. I wish to God I wasn't full of German blood."

I thank God I have none of it in my veins, but the present actions of Germans in America make me think the boy was right about their "dumbness."

As Mr. Hoffman said in the Mid-October issue, "We must stamp out the language and every German alliance."

Think of what Dr. —— ——, a German-American, said to me long ago in Los Angeles when I asked him the question point blank, "Which land will you aid in case of war, your Fatherland or your adopted land?" He threw his right fist high and his face grew dark red and seemed to swell, as he gritted his words through clenched teeth: "*Hoch der Kaiser, bei Gott!* I vas Cherman furst! I shtay mit mein bludt, bei Gott!"

"Are you a citizen, doctor?" said I.

"More as t'irty years, but vat iss dat?"

"How about your oath to renounce the German Empire and its Kaiser?"

"Bapers undt schvearin', vat iss dat? I go mit mein bludt, I tol' you."

As Frank Huston said to me, "There are very few German-Americans in this country, but a —— of a lot of Germans living in America."—E. E. HARRIMAN.

SURELY we need not tell our boys at the front that we of the Camp-Fire are eager to have their letters with whatever of news they can give us. We all know they can send only such news as the censor permits—and all American publications have been asked by the Government to follow a long list of rules for suppressing certain kinds of apparently innocent information that might prove of value to the enemy and that might slip past the censors—but there are many legitimate things to tell. If you tell us only that you're safe and well, why, naturally, we're glad to know it, and there are always little odds and ends that may not seem much to you but that interest us back home.

And of course we always like to hear reports from those of us who, though not in the war, are in far places. It doesn't matter a bit whether you are a skilled writer; we don't care anything about that—what we like is men and facts and deeds.

ANOTHER of the three who in this issue join the writer division of our Camp-Fire follows Camp-Fire custom and introduces himself—Sidney Rittenberg.

Men of the Camp-Fire, you'll probably be yawning wearily before this newcomer has finished the spinning of his tame yarn. But—here goes:

BORN in Charleston, S. C. As a boy, was taken about the country quite a bit by my mother, who had to travel for her health. Always a studious little fellow, reading and thinking much beyond my years, but nevertheless managing to get into just as many fights and bits of devilment as other boys. Finished my schooling in New York City, where I lived several years. Incidentally, began my courting in high school there and, some years after leaving the Big Town, returned for the girl and brought her back South with me.

From New York City I went to a town of two hundred in the wildest part of South Carolina, Berkeley County, and clerked in a country store. A series of coincidences so improbable that they would never get by a fiction editor in a story got me into the newspaper game in Charleston. Octavus

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Roy Cohen, whom most of the Camp-Fire folks know, had a lot to do with it, as he had with a number of other things that have happened to me.

I'M NOT yet twenty-five, but I've been earning my living at writing of one kind or another about seven years. I've done all sorts of newspaper work, from covering weddings and funerals to reviewing plays and writing editorials. For two years I had charge of the editorial work at a large agricultural college and just now I'm secretary of the publicity department of the Charleston Chamber of Commerce. I've also had a fling at the advertising game and have worked in various mercantile establishments.

For two or three years I've written magazine articles and stories. I've had articles in numerous periodicals of many kinds, but I've only recently begun to get my stories across.

EVER since I can remember I've hung about the water-front, and most of the simple adventures I've had have occurred there or at sea. I've talked with men of the sea so much that I feel as if I've been to many parts of the world I've never seen. For example, I believe that if I ever made a voyage from the West Coast through the Straits and up the Atlantic Coast, in the old way, I'd run into few surprises. Of course, this may be a silly belief, but—I have it.

And that's about all, except that I've been rejected by the army people on account of my eyes, but am trying to do my bit by serving as secretary of our County Council of Defense and working with numerous other bodies that are doing war work.

AS TO "Shorty's Letter from Home," my first *Adventure* story, there's little to say except that I got the idea several years ago from a yarn that was told to me by the mate of a British tramp that put into Charleston with nitrate from the West Coast. The big difference was that in his tale, which was about a Hindu prophetess in Calcutta, the chap who got the nasty prophecy had the hard luck to have it fulfilled by hearing of the death of his youngest child—a very gruesome narrative it was, probably invented by the mate for the edification of his young newspaper friend who, as I remember it, was importuning him for stuff of the kind during much of the two months or more that the ship lay in port.—SIDNEY RITTENBERG.

LETTER-FRIENDS BACK HOME

A Free Service Department for American, Canadian, and Other Allied Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Others in Camp or at the Front.

Any one in the United States or Allied service who wishes to brighten the time with letters from "back home," or wherever else this magazine circulates, and with the personal touch and interest of hitherto unkhown frieeds, can secure these letters and these friends by sending us his name and military address to be published once in this department as soon as censorship of soldiers' foreign addresses permits. Among our readers of both sexes, all classes and from all parts of the world, he is likely to gain a number of friendly, personal correspondents. He is free to answer only such as he is comfortably able to answer under the conditions that surround him, and it is even suggested that the number of correspondents for any one man be determined by the needs of his comrades as well as by his own.

This magazine, of course, assumes no responsibility other than the publishing of these names and addresses as its space will permit. Experience has shown that the service offered is a very real and needed one, and all not themselves in service are asked to do their part in making the daily life of those fighting in our defense brighter and pleasanter through personal friendships across the intervening miles and by whatever personal, human kindnesses such friendships may suggest.

When giving your military address make it as permanent a one as possible.

(As the magazine is made up several months in advance, the above notice will appear with only such stray names as happen to come in to us until there has been time for it to reach the camps and the front and for names and addresses to reach us, be put in type and then reach our readers on publication.)

SOME straight talk on hyphenism from Theodore Seixas Solomons, whose stories we've read and enjoyed:

SOMETIME ago a few of your contribs of German and German-sounding names took occasion to record themselves as Americans, and it has occurred to me that the name Solomons might carry a suggestion of Teutonism, at least with some.

I know a lot of Germans and German-Americans. I hate hyphenated Americans—I mean I hate the hyphen and the nation names before it. There ain't no such animal as a French or Spanish or German American, any more than there is a cat-dog or a man of California-Maine birth or citizenship. That, however, is by the way. What I started to say is that there is nothing the matter with a good American, whether he was a German or not, or his parents before him. Nor with a present German living in America, if he is a good German, *i. e.*, a good man who is a German man. What we don't like is people that are not all right. And they are not all right if they can't see that we've got to look out for this country and what this country stands for—as we believe it does; and if they can't or won't either help or, if they are aliens, "stand from under" and not hinder by so much as a look! That's all there is to the alien question. This thing of allowing prejudice against a name to get under one's skin is all wrong.

NEVERTHELESS, I don't know but it is a good thing to make a confession of faith if one "sounds" German. So it will not do any harm at least for me to say that I am a pure-blooded Jew, with a little Polish strain of a hundred years back, and most of me British and Spanish blood of a couple of hundred. For that matter, of course it is all Jewish blood, but of a rearing originally in the countries stated. The Solomonses and Seixases antedated the birth of Washington, being among the first Jews to step upon the Western continents. And, ever since, they have been "doing their bit." They not only fought in the French and Indian wars

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and in the Revolution but they lent General Washington—or his Continental army—money, and their women folks used to dance with him, and they have handed it down to us kids that he was a stiff, ramrodish dancer, at that. One of my forebears helped found Columbia College, and his bas-relief, in which his Israelitish proboscis shines out resplendently, graces the walls of one of the buildings. And they have been doing things since, in a quiet way, in all the mix-ups.

Out here my father was a member of every Vigilantes Committee they had, and I remember him coming home mad one day and getting out the hickory club with the handkerchief loop through a hole in the handle to secure it about the wrist, so no rioter could wrest it from him, and bolting off again. That was when I was emerging from babyhood.

NO SENSIBLE examining board would take me for anything active at present, while there are millions of skookum young blades to draw into the mix-up—though I'm still in the prime of life, when it comes to that—so the next best thing seemed to be to take the place of some fellow who goes into active service. Hence I am now, and have been for some months, in one of the active industries upon which the Government largely depends, and hence also it is that I am not producing many stories for you or the other magazines.—THEO. S. SOLOMONS.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

ADVENTURE'S FREE SERVICES AND ADDRESSES

These services of *Adventure's* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card—not* in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Back Issues of *Adventure*

Will sell: 1915, complete; 1916, complete; 1917, Jan.—Aug. inclusive. Ten cents each, carriage collect.—H. J. SANDERS, 110 Todd St. N. E., Washington, D. C.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concernipg it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located one out of about every five inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 731 Guardian Bldg., Cleveland, O., in charge of preliminary organizing.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's*, Spring and Macdougal, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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ARMY ORGANIZATION

WE HEAR and read a great deal these days about the Signal Corps, Officers of the Line, the Adjutant-General, the Ordnance Department, and other things military. We meet men in uniform with stars on their shoulders or rows of soutache braid on the sleeves of their overcoats. Yet how many of us are sure that the Signal Corps means aviation as well as telegraph, or that the man sitting across the aisle is a General Officer?

We believe there are many who would like to refresh their memories on these things. Therefore we give you this brief outline explaining the organization of our Army.

THE Army is divided into three clssses: The Regular Army, the National Guard, and the National Army.

The Regular Army is that branch of the service which is always under Federal control. The National Guard is made up of troops from different States. In times of peace the National Guard is under State supervision, and the men can carry on civil duties; in times of national emergency the National Guard may be called into Federal service. The National Army is composed of men chosen by selective draft, popularly termed "the draft army."

By the Constitution of the United States the President is made Commander-in-Chief of our Army. He usually exercises this power, however, through the War Department, whose head is called the Secretary of War. The Secretary of War has, under the President's supervision, the care and control of the Army. The affairs of the Army are administered through the various departments and bureaus called "The General Staff Corps." This consists of the "Adjutant-General's Dept.," "Inspector-General's Dept.," "Judge-Advocate-General's Dept.," "Quartermaster's Corps," "Medical Dept.," "Ordnance Dept.," "Corps of Engineers," "Signal Corps," and a "Militia Bureau."

The General Staff is headed by a Chief of Staff, who has general supervision over all matters pertaining to the different departments just mentioned. He is the Commanding General of the Army. Under him those in his General Staff work out the plans for national defense and for the mobilization of our forces in time of war, and also give the Secretary of War professional advice regarding the control of the Army.

Let's take a look at these important departments, which, under the eye of the Chief of Staff, are going to direct this year the spending of billions of dollars.

The Adjutant-General's Department is the bureau of orders, correspondence and records of the Army. The Adjutant-General keeps all the records of appointments, promotions, deaths, operations of troops, etc. His office is the Army's hall of records.

The Inspector-General's Department is the eagle eye which watches the Army's efficiency, sees if the beans are running low, if ammunition is arriving at every point with proper speed and in sufficient quantity. It also looks after the conduct of the troops and makes sure the accounts of disbursing officers are O. K.

The Judge-Advocate-General's Department is the bureau of military justice. The head of the department is custodian of the records of all general courts-martial, courts of inquiry, and military commissions.

The Quartermaster's Corps furnishes the Army its supplies, transportation, animals, fuel, clothing, and a place in which to live, whether tent or cantonment. It is charged with the expenditure of funds appropriated for subsisting the enlisted men and for purchasing articles kept for sale to officers and enlisted men, and has charge of the supply and distribution and accounting for funds for the payment of the Army and for all supplies.

The Medical Department is charged with the supervision of the sanitary condition of the Army and the care of the sick and wounded. It is the most independent of all the staff departments, planning its own hospitals, transporting its own sick and wounded in the field, and supplying its own medicines.

The Ordnance Department supplies the Army with its real "punch"—its arms and ammunition.

The Engineer Department, or Corps of Engineers, reconnoiter, survey and make maps for the Army and handle the construction of fortifications, bridges and military roads.

The Signal Corps is charged with the construction, repair and operation of the military telegraph and telephone lines and cables, field telegraph trains, balloon trains, aeroplanes, etc. It forms the eyes of the Line. It reports results, transmits orders, helps direct the firing, etc.

So much for the Staff and its departments. They have to be maintained so that the most important branch of the Army—the fighting branch—may be effective.

THE fighting branch is called "the Line." It consists of the Infantry, Cavalry, Field Artillery, Coast Artillery, and Engineers.

The Infantry does most of the machine-gun operating, as well as bombing with hand-grenades, and of course fights also with rifle and bayonet and digs trenches.

The Cavalry is used to reconnoiter, feel out the enemy. It often charges, or follows up an enemy in retreat to harass its rear-guard and capture stragglers. The Cavalry carries machine-guns, until recently about one troop to a regiment.

The Field Artillery accompanies an army in the field and includes light artillery, horse artillery, heavy siege artillery, and small mountain artillery.

The Coast Artillery has charge of the fixed and movable elements of land and coast fortifications, including submarine mine defenses.

The Engineers construct saps, mines, pontoons, military bridges, and other construction necessary for the Line forces.

The smallest constant fundamental unit in the

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Line is a company, which is divided into squads, several of which form a section. Two sections usually make up a platoon. The term company is used in speaking of the Infantry, Coast Artillery, and Engineers. In the Field Artillery this unit is called a battery, and in the Cavalry a troop.

The battalion (called squadron in the Cavalry) consists of several companies, usually four.

The regiment, which is the administrative unit in both Infantry and Cavalry, consists of several battalions. An Infantry regiment's strength is 3,600 men.

A brigade is made up of two or three regiments of the same or different arms.

A division consists of two or more brigades, usually including several different arms of the service.

An Army Corps consists of two or more divisions, organized under one command.

The General Officers in the Line and their commands are:

Lieutenant-General, a corps; Major-General, a division; Brigadier-General, a brigade.

An Aide-de-Camp is an officer detailed as confidential attendant upon a General Officer. On occasions he may represent the General officially and socially. The Aides-de-Camp of a General constitute his Personal Staff.

Officers ranking next below the General Officers are called Field Officers. They are Colonels, Lieutenant-Colonels, and Majors.

A Colonel commands a regiment; a Lieutenant-Colonel is the second in command; a Major commands a battalion.

The Colonel's Staff usually consists of two Captains, his Adjutant, and a Supply Officer; one Chaplain is usually assigned to each regiment.

And below the Field Officers rank the Captain, First Lieutenant and Second Lieutenant, this latter being the lowest commissioned officer. A Captain commands a company; the Lieutenants act as platoon leaders.

Below the commissioned officers come the enlisted men, who are divided into two general classes: non-commissioned officers and privates. Those who exercise no authority except as may be given them temporarily by an immediate superior are termed privates; those given warrants by virtue of which they exercise a limited authority are called non-commissioned officers—Sergeants and Corporals. Privates performing the duties of Corporal as a try-out for that position are called Lance-Corporals.

It is possible to tell an Army man's rank and his branch of the service by many details of his appearance.

Take first his hat-cord. If it is plain blue, he is an Infantry soldier; if it's red, he belongs to the Artillery; and if yellow, to the Cavalry. An officer's hat-cord is gold and black with two little gold acorns.

When caps are worn, the enlisted man's cap is the same shape as the officer's. But the enlisted man's cap bears in front the crossed arms of his service and the regimental number, while an officer's cap has a band of braid and the coat of arms of his State, if he be in the National Guard, or of the United States if he is a Regular officer.

The collar of the coat also tells its tale. The enlisted man's collar has a disk of bronze containing the letters "U. S." If a National Guard or National Army, the letters "N. G." or "N. A." (very small) are superimposed on the "U. S." On the other side of the collar another disk gives his regiment, company, and arm of the service. The officer's collar has no disks, but the letters "U. S." and a device to show the arm of service, and regiment. If he belongs to the General Staff, his collar will bear a star with superimposed eagle.

The arm of the service is indicated by crossed rifles for Infantry; crossed sabers for Cavalry; crossed cannon for Artillery; the Signal Corps, two crossed flags with a mace; the Engineers two battlemented towers.

The coat-sleeve of an officer is distinguished by a row of brown braid three inches from bottom of the sleeve on O. D. uniform.

The overcoat of an enlisted man has simply a cuff or a strip of cloth which buttons the sleeve tightly around the wrist. But the officer's overcoat sleeve is cuffless. If it is perfectly plain, without braid, the wearer is a Second Lieutenant. One row of braid, starting at the edge of the sleeve and describing roughly the design of a three-leaf clover, indicates a First Lieutenant; two rows, a Captain; three rows, a Major; four rows, a Lieutenant-Colonel; five rows, a Colonel.

The rank of an officer also may be told by the insignia on his shoulders. One silver bar indicates a First Lieutenant; two bars, a Captain; gold leaf, a Major; silver leaf, a Lieutenant-Colonel; eagle, a Colonel; one star, Brigadier-General; two stars, Major-General; three stars, Lieutenant-General; four stars, General.

Retired officers are those who have been retired from active service. They are a part of the Army, being subject to the rules and articles of war, and may be called, with their consent, back into active service in an emergency.

Retired enlisted men are those who have been retired after thirty years' active service. They are a part of the Regular Army.

HARRY ERWIN WADE

Adventure wishes to give credit to "The Officer's Manual," written by Capt. James A. Moss, which proved a valuable aid in the compilation of the facts contained in this article; also to those Army officers who so kindly read and corrected this manuscript.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for Adventure Magazine by our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each month in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable and standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
S. B. H. HURST, Box 892, Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men, local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Hurst.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N.Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel; game, fish and woodscraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

8. Western U. S. Part 2
CAPT.-ADJ. JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, Yankton, S. Dak. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially* early history of Missouri valley.

9. Western U. S. Part 3
Mexico Part 1
J. W. ROBERTSON, 912 W. Lynn Street, Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

10. Mexico Part 2
J. W. WHITEAKER, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Central and Southern Mexico below a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. History, geography, customs, government, animals, minerals, products and industries.

11. North American Snow Countries Part 1
ROBERT E. PINKERTON, care of Starbuck Ranch, Morrison, Colo. Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Manitoba, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. R'y. Canoes and snow-shoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

12. ★North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

13. ★North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game; minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

15. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel: boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

16. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 397 Monadnock Bldg., San Francisco, Calif. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

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17. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, Sayville, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

18. The Balkans
ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH, *Evening Post*, 20 Vesey St., New York City. Covering Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey (in Europe); travel, sport, customs, language, local conditions, markets, industries.

19. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, care R. J. Neuman, 160 Seaman Ave., Inwood, New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

20. Japan and Korea
ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE, Mountain Lakes, N. J. Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios.

21. Russia and Eastern Siberia
CAPTAIN A. M. LOCHWITZKY, (Formerly Lieut. Col. I. R. A. Ret.) Quartermaster, U. S. Troops, Mercedes, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Skahalin; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

22. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, 1604 Chapin Ave., Burlingame, Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

23. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Castle View, Meriden, Conn. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

24. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

25. Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, 1106 Van Nuys Building, Los Angeles, Cal. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

New Zealand—What It Offers

Question:—"I would like some general information about opportunities in New Zealand for a man with a small stake. I am a steam engineer and auto mechanic by profession. What are the customs of the people, living conditions, etc?"—ARTHUR HANGGELI, Atlantic City, N. J.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—A man with a double-barrelled profession and a small stake can not go wrong in New Zealand if he is prepared to work and break himself into the conditions of a new country. The wages are not high in our Dominion, judged along American lines; but that is more than compensated for in more equable conditions of life; less strenuousness, easier hours and less expenses. A man with your qualifications over here would command four to five dollars per day of eight hours, with a substantial rate of increase for all overtime, and a weekly half-holiday thrown in. Double rates of pay for Sunday and holiday work. The rates of pay, hours and holidays are fixed in nearly all trades by cast-iron industrial awards given through the Arbitration Court, if the Conciliation Council does not agree in the first hearing. But these industrial awards only fix the minimum rates. Ability here, as in the United States, gets its special rates.

Conditions of living? The climate generally is almost ideal—there are no extremes. Our ground is never frozen. We farm—grow things—all the year 'round, and in Wellington, the capital city, which is situated at about the center of the Dominion, snow is a curiosity. The sun is never blazing hot and the cold is never an Antarctic freezer.

We have just over a million inhabitants, of English, Scotch and Irish descent, and we have sent over 90,000 of our young men to the war in Palestine and France, and keep up reinforcements by compulsory service. We are a democratic people, graft is not one of our political diseases, and tipping for services already well paid for is conspicuous by its absence.

You will have to make your title clear in getting away from the United States in regard to war regulations, for ours are very strict at this end. I fancy they are at your end also. Americans have always been welcomed in Maoriland, and they will be more so now that the United States is on-side with us in the war. I would suggest that if and when you decide to come over here, you should endeavor to get the agency for some make of car or engine or other device that would be appreciated in our Dominion. New Zealanders take readily to labor-saving devices. Bring some over with you, and then you can start as your own man, rather than breaking yourself in as the assistant of another.

As we say in New Zealand—

KIA ORA! (Maori for Good Luck!)

Crossing the Atlantic

Question:—"What is the smallest practicable sailing vessel that could safely undertake a trans-Atlantic voyage? How many men would it take to operate it?

"I would like to know something of the construction of the old English "caravel" of the 16th century.

"Also, where can I find a glossary of nautical terms? I am very much of a "land lubber," but the sea has always fascinated me."—JAMES C. MCKAY, Kenneth, Mo.

Answer, by Mr. Hurst:—Your question is a most unusual one. I can only answer it from the standpoint of a first-rate sailor who has in some quaint way decided to try to cross the Atlantic in the most uncomfortable fashion he can imagine. For why desire to sail in the smallest? However, I might tackle it in a sloop or schooner of not less than twenty-five tons. It has been done, I believe, in

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smaller boats, but not for me! I would want four first-rate men with me, and I would try it in Summer, taking the "Southern route." It all depends on the man trying the stunt, but for your own sake, don't attempt it on the experience your letter shows you have—or rather, have not.

A "caravel" was a small, light, fast ship, generally Portuguese or Spanish, of the seventeenth century. The encyclopedia gives you a good description of it. For your "glossary of nautical terms," consult some work on seamanship—Nares or Cogle and Taylor for choice—but you can not hope to learn seamanship from a book. If you try to sail any sort of boat, let alone try the Atlantic stunt you speak of, in your present state of ignorance you will finish unhappily. Take my advice and get some practical man to teach you from the deck up.

Chances in the Yukon

Question:—"I intend to go to the Yukon this Spring and would like general information of working conditions. What has it to offer in the mineral line? How are travel conditions? Is big game plentiful? What reliable rifle is advisable?"—JOSEPH DAMBRA, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—You can get a job in Alaska almost any time and more especially in the Spring by going to Seattle and hiring with an agent of the various railway or construction companies. The pay is good, and by working there for a while you would acquire knowledge of the country and its customs, together with a grub stake. You might write Crane, 201 First Avenue, Seattle, at any time and ask him what he has to offer.

There is plenty of mineral in the country, but remember that prospecting is always a gamble, with the odds against the player; for which reason I would advise getting a good working knowledge of the country and the business before taking it up seriously. A few weeks' chase over the hills in the Summer will pay a big dividend in pleasure and experience, but as a money-making proposition or a get-rich-quick scheme it is a doubtful card.

There is plenty of big game in that country, but the animals have to be hunted. Bear, deer and moose are the most common.

For a rifle, I am a crank on the Winchester .32 special with a long barreled Colt revolver in your belt. This is a short range proposition, but almighty effective in bringing home the game.

The travel conditions are such that in the Summer you have water transportation by canoe or steamer on the beaten trails. In the Winter it is a case of dogs and snowshoes, which leaves much to be desired along the lines of safety, speed and splendor.

Obsession Among African Savages

Question:—"I would like your explanation of 'obsession' among African savages. Is it real or a fake?"—FRANK RHODES, West Toronto, Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Miller:—"Obsession," as practised amongst the West Africans, is a superstition. Briefly, the natives believe they have what is called a "bush soul," that is, a soul that remains always on earth, and, in fact, is only domiciled in a man during his life, when it goes to the bush, to re-enter an animal or tree. Thus the bush soul of one tribe is signified by the leopard, another by the python, and sometimes when a man is about to die he will pick a tree for the reincarnation of his "bush soul."

Another form of obsession is practised by the wizards. Major Leonard, who knows more about West African superstitions than any other man living, relates a case where he witnessed a wizard possess a girl with a leopard. She went down on her hands and legs, growling and snarling horribly, and when raw goat's flesh was thrown to her she clawed and devoured it like a wildcat. She was the victim of her own superstition and fear, less than the victim of any occult power of the wizard's.

Spruce Gum

Question:—"Could you give me approximately the present market price of spruce gum; whether it is to be found in your part of the State, or refer me to where I could obtain more information?"—WM. H. CRATER, Camp Upton, N. Y.

Answer, by Dr. Hathorne:—I think the best quality of spruce gum brings about $2.00 per pound in the Maine market. I know some of the retailers sell it for 30 cents per ounce. There is very little to be found in the vicinity of Bangor. Most of the gum in the market there is brought in by woodsmen from the northern part of the State.

I noticed many good spruce in the territory around Allegash Lake, Maine, where I spent two months last Summer. This section has not been lumbered on for some time, and the spruce have attained a good size. This location is some 175 miles from Bangor. This section is also a good country for fur. In any of the following counties where there is old growth spruce, gum may be found: Aroostook, Piscataquis, Somerset, Penobscot, Washington.

The Andamans and Borneo

Question:—"I would like some information about Borneo; also the Andamans. What chances for a young man there, and what qualifications should he have? How much money is necessary to get one there and hold over till you get something to do? Can one get cartridges for a 30 caliber Springfield 1906 and 45 Colts there or would it be better to take them along?"—F. C. JOHNSON, Somerville, Mass.

Answer, by Mr. McCreagh:—You can get general information from any encyclopedia or other book of reference.

The Andamans are a closed preserve. The Government of India uses them as a penal settlement for its convicts, and an outsider can only gain entry by special permission from the Commissioner at Port Blair. In any case, opportunities for business are practically nil. The natives are quite impossible, in many parts killing the stranger on sight—which incidentally constitutes one of the best safeguards against attempted escape of the prisoners.

As for Borneo: Since I take it that you speak only English, I may say that in British North Borneo you would find plenty of chances to do something worth while—*provided always* that you have enough money to hold out for a few months until you can connect up with something. I would hate to advise anybody to go out there without about a couple of hundred dollars in hand. The best thing you could do would be to get a job with some mining or shipping firm till you could look around a bit. Steamship fare ranges from about

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a hundred dollars up, according to accommodation. For full particulars, however, you had better apply to some agent in your own town or in Boston.

Springfield 30 caliber cartridges would be difficult to get hold of, if not impossible; but you could import them from some dealer in Mindanao, Philippine Islands. 45 Colts you could procure locally in Elopura, British North Borneo.

As to outfit, my advice is always the same. Take nothing with you. You can get the right thing locally at probably a cheaper price than you would have to pay here.

Going to Sea

Question:—"I intend going to sea. In which branch of the Merchant Marine, Coast Trade or Trans-Atlantic, could I learn most in order to take a Government examination? What clothes are best to take along, or do the steamship companies furnish sailors' clothes? Would it be necessary to take any money with me?"—NORMAN BRICE, Freemansburg, Pa.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—In making your choice between Coastal Trade and Trans-Atlantic, or general Foreign Trade, you will do well to remember that the qualifications in the Coastal Trade are very much lower than in the Foreign Trade, and therefore examinations are easier to pass, but to compensate for this condition the rates of pay for all grades are higher in Foreign Trade.

A voyage or two coasting won't hurt you in preparation for the other, but I would advise any seaman to try to qualify for ocean vessels if he expects to make the sea his life profession.

In the big steamship lines, the company outfitter usually supplies the seaman with clothes, and the cost is deducted from his pay for the voyage. The cost is as small as possible, and uniforms are only demanded, as a rule, on passenger steamers. On almost all other ships the seaman wears whatever he likes, and any old clothes will do, supplemented by a couple of suits of overalls. A pair of good rubber boots, sou-wester and suit of oilskins will add to the sailor's comfort, too, though I have been 'round the Horn in Winter without them myself. Anyway, you had better have them. Otherwise, the clothes you wear now are all you need, always, of course, assuming that you are not going in any special trade where climatic conditions render special clothing imperative: such as Arctic, or Equatorial, or Far Eastern ports.

You will need to take your own soap, towels and bed and bedding. This can all be purchased cheaply in the town you ship out of.

Some vessels supply the crew with mess gear, but nearly all freighters don't do this, and you will need your enamel plate—a soup plate will do instead of two plates—cup (pannikin, it's called), knife and fork and spoon.

Outside of these things, just the stuff you'd take on a vacation is all you need.

As for money, depends on length of voyage. In most trades the skipper will advance you money in port, so long as your bill for clothing, tobacco, etc., is not more than the pay you've earned to that date.

I don't advise taking much money, anyway, unless you expect to buy up great stocks of curios. If you take any, don't take much, and KEEP IT TO YOURSELF.

Claims in California

Question:—"Four of us want to go to California. Could we make our living in trapping, hunting and raising our own garden? Are there any claims to be taken near any village or at least high road. How could we get our water supply and what is the cost of such land? Would $500 be enough to start from Chicago with if we traveled in an automobile? Would tents be sufficient protection until cabins were built, and could we build our own cabins?"—FRANK A. HICKEY, Chicago, Ill.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—You may as well give up the idea of *hunting* for the market. There is little game that is allowed exhibited for sale. Trapping is good in parts, but every rancher and boy is trying to get a few extra dollars that way, as soon as the season opens. At one time an expert could figure on from 1,200 to 1,800 good hard dollars each season. Not under present conditions. Something, yes, but not anything large. You can find plenty of deer and other game, but the open seasons are short and the hunters many.

You could do as two young men from this city did one year and have a fine time. They traveled with a light wagon and span of small mules. They worked here and there, a little at a time, on ranches. They hauled a little freight into places where railroads did not run. They shot game and caught fish for their own needs in the season. They spent six months in seeing the three coast States, came home with more cash saved up than they would have had by holding their old jobs and had a million dollars worth of fun.

To do this one must be ready to work hard when occasion presents and take the fun between jobs. Lots of jobs open all the time if a man will take them and do his duty. Ranchers are always wanting men.

Doing this and having the car to move on with, $500 should be plenty for the four of you. But don't be lazy. Work as though you liked it in the times when you must work, then play just as hard later. Wish I could go along with you.

Claims are scarce except on desert or mountains. Don't expect to come here and find a wilderness. There are millions of acres vacant in the sections named, but the valley land is *taken*. Hundreds of acres are cultivated on the mountains. Write to the Department of the Interior for Circular No. 484 and a copy of homestead laws.

In the mountains are thousands of little streams. On the plain we get our water from wells or bring it from the mountains. You may find a good bit of benchland in the mountains with a stream on it or a spring. You have to get out and hunt for those places. If I knew a good one not filed on I would file in my own name, *muy pronto*.

Come; look the country over, hunt up your claim and file, is the only rule I can give you.

Yes, as to tents and cabin building.

Where to Hunt

Question:—"Where can my pal and I locate for the Winter and get good hunting? We prefer some mountainous district as wild as possible.

"We have thought of going in a raceabout car as there's lots of room to store equipment. Do you think we would be able to put it in storage? Would we have to pay rent for land on which to put up a shack?"—LEONARD CROSS, Port Washington, L. I.

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Answer, by Mr. Liebe:—You won't find much real good hunting in the Southern mountains. There are a few squirrels—gray squirrels and little "boomer" squirrels, a few turkeys, a few pheasants, and in the most out-of-the-way places a black bear now and then.

And you would find a Winter in these mountains long and cold and dreary; for my part, I'd rather spend a Winter in the wilds of Siberia. There is much more sport to be had in Florida or in southern Georgia.

My frank advice is not to try spending a Winter in the mountains. Few people ever go there to hunt; most people go to the lowlands to hunt partridges, squirrels and rabbits—and they must have a license, they must have permission from landowners, and they must pay attention to the game laws.

As to throwing up a shack in a remote place in the hills you'd be likely to find lumber hard to get. But you might find an old cabin that would serve. I wouldn't take a raceabout. You could find storage for it, but to go by railroad would be much cheaper.

I'm not acquainted with Virginia very well, but at a guess I'd say you could find as good hunting in Virginia's mountains as in the other mountains.

Trailing the Moose

Question:—"What are the chances for shooting moose in Eastern Canada?"—R. C. Wood, Arlington, Mass.

Answer, by Mr. Sangster:—I consider the new region of N. W. Quebec as affording today probably the greatest chances for big heads and most satisfactory trips for the following reasons: It has an open season starting September 1st, thus affording the essential "water-hunting" and "calling" periods. All this H. of L. territory, both of Ontario and Quebec, is limited to such hunting, with the canoe the only means of transport on the inside or game waters. Hence after the 20th to 25th of October the waters involved are liable, some years, to freeze up. Ontario does not lift her season, even in the farther north until October 10th, affording a mighty brief time to get in on a trip. In Quebec one has all September and October. 2d. It is virgin even yet; virtually unhunted. 3d. It homes all kinds of moose and in parts of it also many bear.

Everything considered, therefore, select Quebec (that is the new northwestern portion south of Amos) rather than Ontario. The non-resident hunting license costs $25.00. Can be reached direct from either Toronto or Quebec City.

LOST TRAILS

Note—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

ADVENTURE HAS FOUND ONE MAN IN FIVE OF ALL THOSE ASKED FOR DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS.

WILLIS, PARKER or Parker, Willis. Used to advertise a liquor cure remedy about ten or twelve years ago. Should like to be put in communication with him or somebody who knows him. Address, E. A. Westin, La Union, El Salvador, C. A.

COOLIDGE, FRANK TOWNLEY, left Milwaukee eight years ago. Age thirty-two, dark hair and eyes and rather stout build. Address sister, Mrs. Geo. A. Barkow, 482 Murray Avenue, Milwaukee, Wis.

POLLEN, JOHN C. B. Last heard of from Haskell, New Jersey; mail there returned uncalled for. Previous to that, was for several months at 1108 West Central Avenue, Toledo, Ohio. 5 ft. 11 in.; about 155 lbs.; hair very dark brown, eyes dark blue; complexion rather tanned. Manner reserved and rather nervous. Write C. A. Pollen, 1513 Second Avenue, Seattle, Washington.

WALLIS, CHARLES EDWARD, my brother. Left home in Tacoma, Washington 10 years ago. Last heard from was in Sacramento Valley, Cal. Was interested in garden work; also worked as miner in Reno, Nevada, 1907; also interested in stock-raising. He is 36 years old, hazel color hair tinted red, blue eyes; about 5 ft. 10 in. tall; 150 lbs. Any information concerning him will be gratefully received. Address Private George Wallis, 18th Co., S. C. Aviation, Nor Island, San Diego, Cal.

FOSTER, TOM. An old friend of mine. Would like to know his whereabouts. Was with him in the U. S. Marines and last seen at the Marine Barracks, Norfolk, Va. Address. Otto M. Kandler, B Co., 7th Regiment, U. S. Engineers, Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas.

VAL. Let me hear from you as soon as you read this Your wife, Helen. Address Mrs. Val. G. Thorpe, care *Adventure.*

ALI MFG. CO., which in 1914 was doing business at 321 Valentine Building, Toledo, Ohio. Write W. C. Radebaugh, Mason City, Illinois, Important.

WADE, ROBERT LEE. Formerly a private in the Hospital Corps of the 17th United States Infantry, on foreign service in Cuba from 1906-09, and on returning to the States was transferred to Fort Meade, South Dakota, and given the rank of sergeant. Any information will be more than ordinarily welcome. Address Dana W. Kerr, Omaja Oriente, Cuba.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the First February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

TARRANTS, LUTHER and WM. BENJAMIN. Last heard of on the *U.S.S. California* in 1911. Present whereabouts wanted by their friend. Address Chas. S. Gray, 217 W. Commerce, San Antonio, Texas.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the first January or mid-January issues of *Adventure.* They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

ACKEN, B. C. (Barney); Anderson, Charles Michell; Burns, Wm.; Byron, W. A.; Campbell, Kennard; Challs, Theodore Menage; Cole, Lubin Merten; Douglas,

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James R.; Dove, Emery; Drummond, J. A.; Edwards, John H.; Fisher, "Bud"; Hoffman, Frank L.; Hottenstein, George Edward; King, Jim; Lindholm, Victor A.; MacConnell, Talbert; Mohoney, Ed.; Newman, Roy A.; Noack, Herbert; Reed, H. Bill; Reiche, Carl; Roan, Texas (Tom); Ryan, Andrew; Sheldon, Wm. X.; Smith, Joseph Burton; Stevens, Wrene Geurea; Talmadge, Henry Arthur; Willard, Thomas Manley; Winnie, Leon Loudon; Yeusan, Alfred.

HASTLAR GAL BREATH, B. Radke Miths, Nelson Marilee.

NUMBERS L. T. 284, C 293, W. 311, W. 312, L. T. 343. Please send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address HARRY ERWIN WADE, care *Adventure*.

THE following names have been inquired for within the past two years. The name of the inquirer can be obtained from this magazine:

ADAIR, WM. L.; Allen, Robert; Allison, Bruce C.; Allen, William C.; Aldrick, R. S.; Ackley, John A.; Ammann, Joseph; Anderson, "Mooney" and "Ravenham"; Anderson, Carl O.; Anderson, Joe; Andrews, Frank Lee; Aniba, or Kennedy, Alfred; Arnold, Edward A.; Armstrong, Thomas; Ash, Captain George; Ashenfelter, Loyd E.; Aveling; Avery, J. F.; Avirette, John A.; Avery, Gus; Baird (Glasgow, Scotland); Basye, Thomas T.; Baust, Henry; Barber, Robert Willis; Basker, Lewis; Bedingfield, "Pink"; Beckett, Hugh (Curly); Beal, George Henry; Bechtel, George; Berridge, Charles Andrew; Bevel, Wiley R.; Bengtbsson, Alfred; Billman, John (Jack); Bloom, Paul or "The White Dutchman"; Bly, Royal R.; Bittel, George; Blakemore, C. Homer; Bliss, Archibald John; Boston, Jim; Boulton, Frederick E.; Bowles, Mrs. Fred; Botts, Mrs.; Bordon, Irene; Bradley, George Shiffer; Braut, Raymond; Brackman, Gus; Brown, Marion M.; Brownell, Richard; Marshall, Robert; Bromley, Arthur; Burnett, Alice; Burnham, Frank; Butler, Jack; Buttgenbach, Frederick; Cain, G. W.; Canavan, Henry; Carey, Charles A.; Carson, J. G.; Cartwright, Jack; Campbell, Webb; Caldwell, Earl; Callen, Philo; Campbell, Arthur; Cecetka, A. F.; Challender, Claude; Chamberlain, Carlyle D.; Clancy, Timothy; Cliff, Harry J.; Clough, Mr. and Mrs. Frank; Clymer, Chas. A.; Chaplin, Frederick L.; Collins, Alfred; Collins, Jim and Michael; Cook, Luther; Conley, Mark Francis; Connors, John or Ed; Cook, E. D.; Cook, James E.; Costelloe, Jack and William Ryan; Coughlin, Dr. Jeremiah; Cowen, J. Gordon; Coy, Alexander Robert and Mollie Coy; Coyle, Arthur; Connolly, Charles; Coresuell, Athol G.; Conwell, John A.; Crawford, Geo. H.; Crowell, John J.; Cullen met on Joy Line from New York to Providence; Cumery, Bessie Curtis, George; Crossley, John; Curran, Joe; Cummings, Harold R; Cramer, John; Crisp, Edward; Crofft, Marie Gonzalez; Darling, Chas. H.; Dawnie, George M.; Davis, John B.; Darlington, Chas. H.; De Breuil, Armand; Decker, E. L., Sergt. U. S. M. C.; De Lano, Frank M.; Dennis, Lee A.; Denson, John; Dewitt, E. L.; DeVeroy, Leslie; Diliert, Howard; Dickeson, Arthur D.; Dishon, Birt or (Shorty); Dodson, Lucian; Doven, John; Downer, Simon; Downer, Vearne; Downing, Flora F.; Driebebles, Jack; Drinkwater, Everett E.; Douglas, L. D.; Duncan, Jasper N.; Dunlup, Tom; Dunn, Mark M.; Dyer, Michael; Dunn, J. G.; Ebert, Gertrude; Elliot, Robert; Egan, Edward and Edward Kavanagh; Eastman, Harvey; Evans, Frank; Ethridge, Mrs. Celia; Estelle, Ed. J.; Fairbanks, Frank G.; Farnsley, Allie A.; Fernald, L. W.; Finley, Sam.; Fish, Eber; Fisher, Joseph; Fitzgerald, Garret; Flanigan, Mr. or Mrs.; Flewelling, Ernest; Floyd, Norris; Flynn, James; Flynn, Maurice J.; Flanagan, George; Foine, Alf; Follett, Bob; Foster, Ben and E. D. Cook; Foote, Alden Willert and Arthur Longworth Foote; Fodder, "Fat"; Footsie, Usher; Ford, Ed. W.; Frain, James; Frain, Roderick; Freeman, Al; Fromme, Harry E.; Frankie, "Bottles"; Fredericks, Frank; Gerdner, Frank; Garnache, William J.; Gattey, Capt. G. G.; Garrison, Chas.; Garde, Corporal C. B.; Gardner, Henry; Getchell, Ernest A.; Gibson, Arthur E.; Gilbert, "Pink Pill"; Gearhart, Ray; Glover, Martin; Gormley, Harry J.; Green, Glenn S.; Greathouse, John T.; Griffin, Barry; Gruman, Herschell J.; Gutteridge, Edward J.; Gullette, Willis; Hager, Robert; Hampton, Paul; Hammond, Warry; Hammond, Edward; Hamilton, Mildred Frances; Hammer, Charles; Hanser, Edward; Harper, John; Hart, Jack; Harris, George; Harbin, Hayden; Hassler, Charles; Heckert, Harry or "Texas Joe" Tracy; Heffern, Edward; Heinze or Hanies; Helmick, Roy J. and Carl H.; Heyer, Milton; Hickman, George D.; Hill, R. E.; Hiliman, Frank; Hines, Ralph or "Shorty Hines"; Hipple, Clyde; Hoffman, A. C.; Hoffman, Albert F.; Hoffman, Frank L.; Holland, Frank; Hoffman, A. F.; Hoffman, August F.; Houston, W. T. D.; Howard, John; Howlett, Lee; Howley, Jim; Honey, J. T.; Howard, Will or Jack; Huber, Henry M.; Hulings, Frank; Hunt, Arthur; James, J. R.; Jaffeman, Noelin; Jefferson, John; Jette, Herbert; "Jew Sam"; Jewell, John H.; Jennings, Andrew; Johnson, Ernest; Johnson, James Belton; Johnson, W. H.; Jones, Charles Augustus; Jolliffe, Arthur; Jones, Harry Bainton; Kavanagh, Edward and Edward Egan; Keene, John; Kellogg, Kenneth; Kennedy, Frank; King, Frank M.; Kirkpatrick, Clyde M.; Kirby, Ben; Kilder, Irwin; Knight, Joe; Kopp, Elmer; Korns, Paul; Sergt. Shields; Ben Bormer; Henry Pullman; Frank Harrington; Lambert, H. L.; Lawver, I. H.; Lackey, Phoenix A.; Liberati, Eugen; Linn, Robert Hamilton; Lloyd, Ralph; Lockwood, J. A.; Logue, Dan; Loomis, Johney; Long, John Wesley; Lorraine, Frank; Lounsbury, Herbert Harley; Lindsay, Alfred; Lovell, Jack; Lyons, Buddy; McArdle, James; McCann, Elman, C. J.; McCarthy, J. J.; McDonald, Jack, McGorray, Lawrence; McGuire, Thomas, James; Mac, G. F. R.; MacKenzie, Thomas; McKay, Raymond; McLaughlin, Moses Hunt; McLaughlin, Dr. C. H.; McLanahan, Mrs. Caroline; McGregor, Stuart; McDaniel, George; McDonald, Geo. A.; McAndrews, Don; McEnaney, Philip J.; McWorth, W. D.; Mafiei, Heck; Mahoney, Dan; Mahoney, Ed.; MacVicar, J. F.; Maiden, Wilson F.; Mackie, Jacob O.; Markley, Isohm; Marine, Colonel Chas. A.; Marshall, Robert; Martin, Alfred; Martin, W. J.; Marz, last heard of in Frisco; Mason, Joseph Ernest; Mauk, Stanley M.; Maxiam, Marcotte; Martin, Florence; Marshall, Charles N.; Martin, Charles A.; Merrill, Russell; Miller, Marcellus Dell; Miller, William Addison; Miller, "Virgy"; Miller, Thomas Lion; Montross, Samuel; Montgomery, Samuel B.; Moehrig, Fritz; Moore, Frank L.; Moore, J. A.; Moore, William; Morris, Frank; Moore, Mrs. Mae; Morey, Sylvester; Moore, Robert H.; Morrison, Karl C.; Mulligan, Martin; Murray, "Edith" Sydney; Mullen, David W.; Murph, "Kid" Frank; Naugler, Owen V.; Nesbit, Henry; Neuton, Jesse O.; Nickerson, Joseph; Niell, H.; Nobel, Washington Arthur; Norris, Joe L.; Olson, Ole; Olsen, Edward T.; Olson, John; Ott, Charles; Ovestry; Owen, G. P.; Owens, Clyde; Palmer, A. M., Jr.; Palmer, Glen; Paschall, Hula; Parker; Page, Donald W.; Payne, W. J.; Peralto, Jose L.; Peters, W. Milton; Peterson, Earl Leslie; Pickens, Osmer; Piggott, Arthur W.; Pinney, Bertie; Poole, Charles W.; Pollock, G. A.; Phillips, Wm. L.; Poole, Arthur; Prickett, Stone J.; Pritzart, Albert; Preston, Bud; Randall, W. S.; Raven, Frank A.; Raymond, George H.; "Reckless, where are you?"; "Reckless Billy"; Reed, William; Reid, Blair McD.; Reilly, John A.; Rand, Ferris, C.; Ramsey, Fitch W.; Rhode, Gust; Rice, Andrew; Rice, Mark; Rice Charles B.; Richard, Charlie E.; Rickard, Mrs. Lauretta; Rimer, J. D.; Roach, Henry; Roberts, Joe; Richard, Arthur; Richardson, Frank Eply; Rider, Wm.; Ritter, W. M.; Riley, A. F.; Robinson, Boyd; Robinson, Benjamin; Roberts, Charles A.; Rogers, George John; Romandovski, Ellia von; Rowe, Theodore; Rowan, A. S.; Rundle, Edgar; Russell, H. S.; Russell, John Mac T.; Ryan, William; Sargent, Richard Ingalls; Sammons, Wm. H.; Saaranen, Julius; Schane, Ben; Schell, Fred B.; Schmidt, Louisa and Charles; Schwerin, William H.; Schafer, Jacob; Schoenfeld, Ed. O.; Sells, William M.; Semple, James T.; Seton, Capt. Robert Arthur; Sharp, Jesse R.; Sharpe, Melburn (Curly); Shaw, William F.; Sheem, Thomas Eugene; Sedley, Edward; Shepherd, "Jack"; Sloane, Howard K.; Signal, Clarence J.; Smith (rubber worker); Smith, Geo. L.; Smith, Ruth B.; Smith, John; Slider, Ada; Smedegard, James; Smith, J. J.; Snyder, William; Solar, Wm. T.; Spanoro, Corporal A. T.; Spears, R. S.; Spencer, Alma; Spiegelhalder, Tyler; Starlight, Captain; Starnes, Edwin G.; Standbaugh, Lester; Stewart, Fred S.; Stringfellow, Jessamine; Stuart, Harry (Curly); Stumpf, Julius; Stuart, Frank Wm.; Stebbins, Charles; Stettler, Lloyd; Spurling, Andrew B.; Stephenson, "B"; Stoner, William H.; Stanley, Jack (Quills); Summers, Thomas M.; Swain, Fred; Swanander, Gust and Pete; Swarm, E. A.; Sweeny, Henry A.; Sullivan, Eric; Talmadge, George W. and Reuben W.; Taylor, Charles G.; Taylor, H. E.; Tallman, Henry Merritt; Tennehill, Edward DeWitt; Talbot, Allan Wheeler; Terrusse, L. S.; Teddy (E. E. G.); Thomas, Willis I.; Thompson, Frank J.; Thompson, Jim F.; Thurston, Frank A.; Thayer, Louis Merton; Thorpe, Val.; Tobisen, Charles J.; Ton, W. R.; Towne, George H.; Townsend, Harry S., Montana; Travers, Stanley; Trevor, Roland (Scotty), Tompkins, Robert A. "Tex"; Tyler, George; Tuggle, Will S.; Uptegrove, Elmer; Vail, Daniel; Van Horne, Walter W.; Van der Horst, Fritz; Walsh, Billy; Walbert, Morris; Wallace, Oliver R.; Walmer, Hugh Victor; Walling, Lew; Watson, E. E.; Welch, Douglas; Weber, Fred; West, M.; Weyman, Jack; Wheatton, H. L.; Wheeler, Joseph Harry; White, Hugh; White, Carl; White, John S.; Whitfield, Robert; Westcott, George; West, Rolla; Wickens, Fred; Wiethaler, Fred; Wildt, John; Williams, Lewis or Bill; Williams (Santiago Bill); Wilson, Lewis E.; Wilson, D. L.; Wilbur, Walter; Wiley, Thomas W.; Wilhelm, George Washington; Williams, Covert P.; Whitmer, William and Orlando; White, John S.; Whitlatch, James Monroe; Wittenkamp, Ove; Woonton, Charles; Workman,

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Edward; Williams, Geo. W.; Wood, Basil; Wright, Granville; Yarbrough, Lawrence Seven (Bonnie); Yeager, Neva M. and her daughter Helen; Zappert, Walter.

MISCELLANEOUS—Courish, Andrew, Dona Ana, N M. 1898. Also Mike Grace, somewhere Rocky Mountains, 1900, and Frank Whelan, California, 1913; J. P. C.; Boys of Troop 9, 13th U. S. Cavalry, 1908-11. Also those in Parhm & Dean Lumber Camp, North Brownville, Me., Winter of 1913; Comrade, B Company, 7th Infantry, January 15, 1897 to October 27, 1898; James, Elias, Allegheny, Pa.; Kenny, John, Pittsburg, Pa.; Miller, Henry, Detroit, Mich., served in Company B, 19th Infantry, in Porto Rico, 1899; Comrades of the 17th B. T. A.; Comrades, A Company, American Insurrectos, 1900-11; G. A. M.; Any of the boys on the tug *Tatoosh*, 1911, time of rescue of *S. S. Washington*; Any boys in the 4th or 36th U. S. C. A. C., 1911-13; Friend, who answered my ad which appeared in *Adventure* during 1913. You will recognize me by the capital W. and arrow on the backs of my letters; F. E. S.; First or second mates on the barkentine *Emily Waters* on trips to South America and around the Horn or to Australia and Barbadoes; Old Comrades of the 70's that were in the Adobe Wall Pocket Cañon and Yellow House Fight; Comrades of Company D, 17th Infantry, in Mindanao, P. I.; Comrades serving in Company I of the 40th U. S.; Any of the crew of the U. S. torpedo-boat destroyer *Dale*, 1903-06; Any of the Florida boys who were out in the Everglades with Collecheche and Shapley the Winter of 1914-15; Will the red-headed chief steward who took the *S. S. Berkshire* on her trip to Jacksonville, Fla., from Philadelphia on September 25th, write to me—F. D. Ellis; Soldier of "E" Company, 38th Volunteers, stationed in Lipa, Batangas, P. I., in January, 1900; Any one knowing the whereabouts of the LaBlache (white) family that was settled in Southern States around Tennessee and Arkansas during Civil War. Or family of John "Ambeau" will learn something of interest if they communicate at once—Mrs. E. C. Perry; Boys of the 97th Battalion, C. E. F., American Legion. Also boys of the 16th Platoon, D Company; Parties who participated in expedition to Tiburon Island about eighteen months ago; Any one knowing the whereabouts of my step-sister, daughter of William Stewart and full brother to John Stewart; Mrs. ——, maiden name Wallace; American Legion (of Canadian Expeditionary Force) Boys attention. Boys of the 213th Battalion; Overseas Battalion, C. E. F. Also boys of A Company, or Bugle or Drum Corps of Camp Borden; English, where are you now?; Survivors of Company H., 6th Regiment of Infantry, California Volunteers, War of the Rebellion; Boys of Company T, P. S. of T.; Fred; H. E. F.; Any of the boys that were to sail with The Adventure Expedition, from New York, on the last of September or the first of October; Honduras expedition of 1888. Want men who took part in it; Fickle, Captain A. V.; Freholm, Mrs. H. E.; Smith, John S.; Runyan, Leroy; Gutteridge "Bo"—Dennie Leary, Pete; "Batt" Strand and "Scratch"; Howard Moody; Fred Johnson; Harpoole and Mechanic, Fred Yeager; Freeman, H. Wynne; Hallett, Mr. Bennett; Students of Chesterfield School, North Vancouver, B. C.; H. W. H., my brother—Leslie Hughes.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

You will like the Mid-February *Adventure*. When you open it on January 18th you will find these nine gripping stories, besides the two mentioned on page 2:

Tal Taulai Khan *A Complete Novelette*
By H. A. Lamb

Another story of *Khlit*, the sixteenth-century Cossack warrior, and the strange part he played in the great hunt of *Tal Taulai Khan*, chief of the Black Kallmarks.

Vag *By E. E. Harriman*

Vag is only a dog—a mongrel pup. But the part he plays in the life of *Ben Avery* makes this story worth the telling.

The Welding *By Roy P. Churchill*

The *Miami* was, in the words of its officers, "a madhouse." The trouble was a green, undisciplined crew. The United States Navy has overcome that before—but not quite in this way.

Hair-Trigger Hollibaugh *By W. C. Tuttle*

Hair-Trigger Hollibaugh is a sleepy fellow—but it takes a sleepy fellow to start something in Blue Nose. The only trouble is he starts things too fast.

In the Shadow of Pontiac
By Hugh Pendexter

A tale of the early colonial days, of *Chief Pontiac*, the terror of the westernmost settlements, and of *Red Gennet*, a free ranger, who feels trouble in the air and steps into it.

With Sharp Sword-Edges
A Five-Part Story. Part III
By Farnham Bishop and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur

In this instalment *King Harald* meets the formidable Thrandheim kings, all eight of whom meet to oppose him. And meanwhile *Gandalf* and *Haki* busy themselves in Westfold. A tale of ancient Norse warriors.

Jersey Moon *By E. Kirby Keener*

Alaska, the land of quick wealth and money-mad mine-owners, has no use for cripples. But *Jersey Moon* doesn't realize that.

Afraid of the Bar *By Harrison R. Howard*

Jack Duncan was a second mate and probably always would be a second mate, because of the bar. It scared him, unnerved him, haunted him. But the day comes when he must meet it.

The White Kaffir *By L. Patrick Greene*

Even to the dark spots of Africa, to *Chief Lomboso's* village on the Zambesi River, the great war penetrates, and men show the steel of which they are made.

MID-FEBRUARY ISSUE

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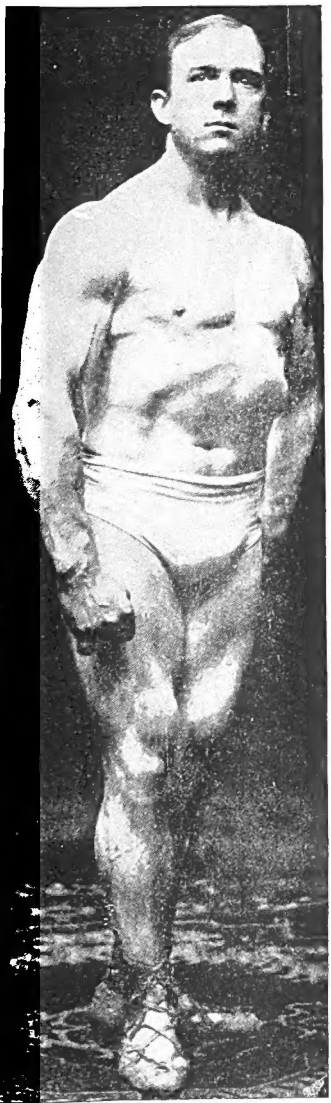
What Kind of a Man Are YOU?



YOU, young or old? In your teens or in your sixties, can you face life day by day, cheerfully, with the stamina to keep going, or to rise to better things? OR, are you held down with the consciousness of your own physical and mental weakness?

YOUNG or old, you will be left behind, among the incompetents, unless you have real HEALTH. No man ever succeeded without it.

YOU MADE MISTAKES—so has every man. But the Real Man rises above his mistakes, makes the lesson it gave him serve him to better things. So can you. You don't have to go through life, Weak, Run-down, Nervous, Debilitated, Memory Failing, all Kinks and Pains.

YOU can be Strong, Vigorous, Vital, Manly! The means are here. Let me tell you how.

YOU CAN COME BACK!

I can Re-build you. Make you over again. Re-vitalize you. Fill life with the joyousness of its purpose. I, personally, am the result of the System I have perfected. I live this life, I breathe it, I radiate it to all my pupils, daily and they become as I! I can change your whole life, for the better. I do not care what your physical ills, nor your mental worries, they yield to the Power of Strongfortism, embodying as it does the true principles of Nature's laws. No DRUGS, OILS, PHYSICS, PILLS or other PIFFLE! Just Nature, her kindly ways, under my personal guidance, and you have the safe, sure, perfect way to HEALTH, Strength, Physical Power, the VIG OR that makes every breath Ecstasy!

I Can Save YOU

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED ENOUGH IN YOURSELF to ask me a few questions. It won't cost you anything. It will not put you under any obligations. Just because you fell, because you made *that* mistake, don't let it drag you down. Don't let it be a millstone about your neck. Tell me in confidence of your physical troubles, no matter what they are and I can advise you and help you wonderfully. Yes, I will give you

ADVICE FREE!

If you knew the work—the wonderful good that I have been doing for so many years you would not wonder why I appeal so strongly to EVERY MAN to come to me and let me help him. This is my life work. It is not a question of money, it is a QUESTION OF HELPING YOU.

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Brand Whitlock

Lawyer, writer, publicist, became nationally prominent as Mayor of Toledo, Ohio. An independent candidate, running against four others, he was first elected in 1905. After serving four consecutive terms, he declined the nomination for a fifth. A student of and authority on civic problems. Author of a life of Abraham Lincoln, of several novels, including "Her Infinite Variety," "The Happy Average," "The Turn of the Balance," "The Fall Guy," and of many essays, poems, and short stories. Appointed U. S. Minister to Belgium in December, 1913. Now at the seat of the government of Belgium in Le Havre, France.

Brand Whitlock

United States Minister to Belgium

had earned a reputation as an able and forceful writer, an attainment to which he has added a notable record for practical achievement.

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